

## **In Memory of Steve (Willo) Williams Some recollections and anecdotes 28 August 2022**

### **THE FUNERAL**

#### **Steve Williams and Shane Warne**

It was as many of us were about to set off, or were even en-route to Steve's funeral that the news of Shane Warne's passing came through. A remarkable coincidence. As we waited to go inside, someone mentioned that both Warne and Willo had been legendary leg-spinners in their own way.

Their similarities did not end there. The photographs on the service sheet and in Willo's newspaper cuttings are a reminder that Steve was quite dashing in his youth and that the two of them shared more than a passing resemblance.

More than that, they were both risk-takers who enjoyed life and who at their respective levels were capable of brilliance and in their own ways, lived life to the full.

Both enjoyed a pint and a fag, and you imagine they would have enjoyed each other's' company. Warne would have relished a trip with Willo in Willo's parents' car and Willo would have told Warne how he could improve as a commentator.

Warne, the world's greatest ever leg spinner did not turn his googly as far as Willo (although it is fair to say that Keeno occasionally reminded Willo that there was more to leg spin than how far you could spin it). You

wonder how good Warne could have made Willo had their ages been reversed and had they bumped into each other in the nets.

For his part, Steve made countless centuries but Warne's top score in tests was 99 and Steve could probably have imparted some batting advice, not least on how to nick a single when it mattered and that you didn't *have* to reach a hundred by trying to hit the ball out of the ground, even though by instinct that is what they would have both preferred to do.

Whether they could have offered each other good advice on relationships and courtship is a moot point but it would have made for an interesting conversation.

They would each have seen a lot of themselves in each other.



Roger Downes, Dave Rutt, Willo and Bob Floyd

Here is a transcript of the tributes made to Willo at his funeral

**Stephen Ralph Williams, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at Chilterns Crematorium  
Service conducted by Gail Kemp, Professional Celebrant**

**Opening music: Rock and Roll – Led Zeppelin**

**Gail Kemp:** Celebrant

Good afternoon, and what a remarkable, rousing welcome to this service of celebration of, and farewell to a rather remarkable man! That track comes from Led Zep IV, Steve's favourite album – say what you like, the man had taste!

My name is Gail and I am a member of the Fellowship of Professional Celebrants, and I don't usually have the privilege – or the pleasure – of meeting the people whose services I lead, but I did know Steve, quite well, some years ago.

We used to play bridge together and I think Francis would probably agree with me when I say that Steve played bridge the way he lived his life, fast, fearlessly, with a touch of humour, with the occasional flash of frustration and with a panache that at times bordered on the reckless! No question, Steve was "a character"; there never was a guy for whom Frank Sinatra's My Way would be a more appropriate epitaph – but Steve was far too much of a serious old rocker for that!

He was a cherished friend, brother, son, father and grandfather and our hearts go out to everyone who will miss his vibrant presence in their lives. But we remember especially his mother Norma. Norma, no mother should ever have to attend her child's funeral, the love and thoughts of all of us are with you today. And,

of course, we think of Ben...the loss of our father is one of the greatest any of us ever has to face and Ben, we know how much it would mean to your dad that you have planned this service with so much thought and love.

It's no secret that Steve didn't take good enough care of himself in recent years, his was a long slow decline that accelerated rapidly in recent weeks. After a short time in Brook House, he passed away in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> February and he will be so greatly missed.

And it is so sad that we lose him now, at this very difficult time in our history and that his last years were spent under the shadow of Covid. It has been a tough time for all of us but especially so for people living alone and although we are beginning to hope that we are at the beginning of the end of that particular nightmare (or probably, more accurately, the end of the beginning) we know that not everyone who would want to be with us today is able to join us.

So we hold all absent friends and family members in our thoughts too. They, too, are very much part of our service which is a time to remember everyone who mattered to Steve and who played a part in his life, a life that has ended too soon.

But it was the American journalist Hunter S Thompson who memorably wrote about how, in his words, 'the thrill of speed overcomes the fear of death'. He said: "Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a Ride!"

Stephen Ralph Williams definitely enjoyed his ride among us and we're going to tell the story of that ride the best way possible through those who shared the ride with him. And we begin with someone who has known him longer than just about anyone here. his brother Chris.

#### **Tribute from Chris Williams**

May I thank you all on behalf of Steve's family as well as my mother, sister and myself for coming today to commemorate the life of my brother Steve.

Steve was born in the Shrubbery Nursing Home off the top of Amersham Hill in High Wycombe and spent the first four or so years of his life in a house called Cooden literally just a stone's throw away on the other side of Amersham Hill.

Right from the start, he showed a propensity for all kinds of sport, especially cricket, following in our father's footsteps, as demonstrated by swinging a bamboo cane to slice off the heads off Mum's prize tulips. Evidence of his mischievousness and unpredictability, qualities he later channelled into all his sports playing, he was caught on cine film on the lawn there, dipping his finger into my christening cake and proceeding to lick it with glee.

Just before our sister Kim was born, we moved around the corner to Little Chestnuts in Terry Road. The garden there had a large lawn where he spent many hours playing cricket, trying to avoid losing balls in the hedgerow on one side, or smashing sixes into Mum's amazing rose garden on the other side.

During those years, our summer holidays were spent at the family bungalow in Pevensey Bay, where the path in the front garden led directly onto the pebble beach. Two doors down, the 22 yard long path served perfectly as a practise pitch and he spent many hours playing there with friends. For many years, we didn't have a television at Pevensey, and most evenings, and when it was raining, we played cards, especially Hearts, for hours on end. His love of playing cards was something he continued to enjoy all his life.

He went to school at Thorpe House in Gerrards Cross, where his prowess as an all-round sportsman won him the Victor Ludorum. Then he went to St Edward's, Oxford, again excelling in all the seasonal sports. He

made it to the first teams in rugby in the autumn, hockey in the spring and cricket in the summer. I spent many a Saturday afternoon on the side-lines with Dad, who would come over to watch him play.

Strangely, it's the hockey I remember most: Steve flying through the air with hockey stick outstretched to make a lethal tackle. Damage was done on more than one occasion!

This was during the early 70s when, during the three-day weeks, Steve would take advantage of the blackouts to set up poker dens. No-one could really believe he and I were brothers: he - the sportsman, shortish with blond hair (yes, he had hair once upon a time!) and me - the musical academic: tall, dark (as I was then) and handsome!

He worked hard all his life, to begin with as a salesman, and always getting out there and immediately finding another when made redundant. But I think he was happiest towards the later part of his life when he became a driving instructor, and master of his own time. He was very proud of the number of pupils who passed, usually first time, but this success rate meant he was always having to find new ones.

After school, our lives diverged somewhat: Steve left home when he married Sarah, whilst I went on to follow my career in music around the country and eventually in India. But on returning in 2018, this was when his health began to decline and I was able to take him to medical appointments and latterly, visit him in hospital.

So, I feel I have been around for the beginning and the end, bookending his life. To finish with, being a musician, I would like to recall some musical memories of Steve. I remember him failing to convince me that Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple were the best things that had happened in music since Bach and Beethoven; him dancing with our Shetland sheepdog, singing the theme tune to the TV series Robin Hood, substituting the name Robin with that of our dog, Rocky; and, this is a very weird memory, since everyone was encouraged to have a go at learning an instrument at school, I remember him bringing home a trombone and playing a note, I emphasise just one note, but making a surprisingly beautiful sound. Perhaps there was an innate talent there, which was never followed up, but inherited by his son, Ben. I'd like to sign off with a short piano piece I have written in his memory, called Remembrance.

**A recording of a piece called “Remembrance” written especially for the funeral by Chris was then played.**

**Gail:** That was really beautiful Chris, not quite Led Zeppelin or Deep Purple but I think Steve would still have given it the thumbs-up. He was a man who enjoyed many things, a man of strong opinions (and never afraid to express them!), but a man with enormous empathy and a big heart and, as you said Chris, exceptional sporting skills. On the rugby pitch he was something of a legend but, as everyone knows, Steve's passion was cricket. Cricket was a hugely important part of Steve's life and today certainly wouldn't be complete without some words from those who knew him on the pitch (and of course in the pavilion afterwards!) so I'm going to hand over for more about Steve's cricketing and rugby exploits.

#### **Tribute by Graham Keens assisted by Bob Floyd, read by John Rolfe**

I first came across Steve on the rugby field.

My good friends Bud Dare, Dave White, and Steve and Simon Cook had played rugby at John Hampden Grammar School - a school noted for football and not rugby and they had gone down to High Wycombe Rugby Club at Kingsmead to sign on for their Colts team – Under the watchful eye of manager Dennis Nott.

I soon joined them. We were only 16/17 years old playing in U-19 colts rugby and we lost every game up to Christmas and into the New Year. Then, in January 1970 we acquired a new player, Steve Williams. He had been schooled at the posh sounding St Edwards School, Oxford.

He played at scrum half – his wavy long blond hair was like Faf Du Plessis the current South African International and he looked like a fine player. He looked fit, had a spin pass and could ‘boot’ the ball miles. There was an immediate impact and we soon won our first game.

Watching, as I did, as a ‘soft’ centre I did note, early on however, that when he ended up at the bottom of a ruck with all those big pack boys lying on top of him, he did tend to squeal a bit. So based on self-preservation, he soon transferred to full back where he added an outrageous dummy to his armoury of kicking skills, which included drop goals from the halfway line and ‘screw kicks’ which would sail 50/60 yards down the pitch and then fall gently into touch. These moments would concern the opposition who would reluctantly marvel with us at this display of skill.

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He soon settled in to a new circle of friends. We would meet and go out on a Friday night. Sometimes we would gather at Steve’s house in Terry Road off Amersham Hill where we met his parents Peter and Norma. Surprisingly, sometimes, they let Steve drive us to the pub in their very nice Apple Green, Triumph petrol injected 2.5 litre car. We would then go straight to the motorway 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120!!! – Although my eyes were shut when the call of 120 was made! To this day still the fastest I have ever been in a car.

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Bud Dare and I played cricket at Ernest Turners Sports, whose ground was at Totteridge in High Wycombe and Steve transferred to Turners Cricket Club from High Wycombe Cricket Club.

Bud, myself and Steve, were soon joined by Chris Johnson and Bob Floyd.

One of my favourite memories of Steve on the cricket field was playing for Turners on a Sunday at Tring Park. They batted first and raked up a big score- before our top batsmen all got out for not very many. So Steve and I found ourselves at the wicket with 20 overs to go in the last hour. We decided to “have a net” and the first 14 overs passed without incident. Then they brought back their opening bowler who had just started opening the bowling for the full mens’ Buckinghamshire County XI. Although he was fast – it was a good wicket and we negotiated his first over OK. The time was now 7.20 with 10 minutes to go, and before this bowler’s next over Steve had noted he was on 34 and wondered if he could get 50 before time at 7.30. I edged the first ball of the next over for 1 and then watched Steve flail the new Bucks opening bowler to all parts of the ground 4,4,2,4,4. Steve raised his bat to acknowledge our team’s applause while the bowler kicked his cap all the way to the boundary in disbelief.

Steve played for Buckinghamshire Young Amateurs in 1970 to be joined by Chris Johnson, Bob Floyd, Bud Dare and myself in 1971 and 1972.

We had two great years at Turners before Norman Turner died and the cricket ground was sold. Bud and I went to play cricket at High Wycombe while Steve, Bob and Chris went to Bledlow with a number of the other Turner’s players.

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Back to rugby. Based on the now successful U19 colts team, HWRUFC set up a new side ‘The Lions’ which was about 3<sup>rd</sup> XV level and was an U-23 side where we all continued to play together.

I vividly remember playing a ‘Lions’ match against Shoreditch College played at Royal Holloway College in Egham where they later filmed a lot of Harry Potter. They were a very good side, but luckily for us the pitch was very narrow.

We spent the first half tackling, tackling and tackling and being driven backwards. When we won the ball we gave it to Steve to launch one of his ‘howitzers’ back down the pitch and this process was repeated throughout the half. Somehow, we got to half time with the score 0-0 and half time oranges were consumed while skipper Bud tried to convince us we could win this match.

We decided to perform a specialist move in the second half, which we practised regularly, for which the call was usually “double dutch”. On this occasion however the whole backline, apart from me, was a ‘Steve’ so on this day we called it the ‘double Steve’.

The ball came out to Steve John a Fly Half, I would make a dummy scissors move with him while shouting Steve, the next centre who confusingly was also a Steve Williams (aka The Welsh Steve Williams) would also make a dummy scissors move also while shouting Steve. Our Steve Williams (ie Willo) would then arrive at pace in between Steve John at Fly Half and Steve Cook on the wing for a magnificent line break.

The opposition would never work that out - What could go wrong?

Our Steve executed his part to perfection and went sailing through the gap, at pace ----but unfortunately - with no ball! A total mess but to much merriment and much analysis later, after the match when we repaired to The Barley Mow in Englefield Green.

We went back to tackling and tackling again with Steve occasionally belting the ball back down their end so that the second half was a total repeat of the first half, with the one exception of Steve Cook slotting over a penalty from 45 yards on a rare visit to their half, for a famous 3-0 win, but it was Willo's huge line kicking most of all that won us that match.

Steve went on from the 'Lions' to play 3<sup>rd</sup> XV, 2<sup>nd</sup> XV and the 1<sup>st</sup> XV where he was affectionately known as 'Coco' due to his occasionally outrageous play. He then returned to captain the 3<sup>rd</sup> XV where he was always keen to encourage young talent and did a great job.

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Back to cricket. Although he did spend two years with Wooburn Narkovians his main Cricket career was with Bledlow Cricket Club where he scored over 35,000 runs. It is significant to recall on the day that one legendary leg-spin bowler, Shane Warne has passed away, that another legendary leg-spinner took countless wickets with leg spin bowling that included a very good 'googly' which fooled many a batsman. One season he scored over 2000 runs and bagged over 100 wickets. He could also throw the ball a country mile. In those days, his wife Sarah would do the teas with Bob Floyd's wife Diane, assisted after a while by Ben.

Bledlow has a proud record in the National Village Knock Out competition and reached the quarter finals against the powerful Langleybury side (near Watford) in 1986 taking the match to the very last ball. Steve's record of two 150s and numerous 100s including 100s in four separate decades in the Village KO is a mark of his talent with the bat. Willo playing in a final at Lords would have been great!

Bledlow Cricket Club on Tour on the Isle of Wight brings up my final tale about Steve and cricket.

We were playing at Ventnor on the south of the island – a ground that all who play there remember, as the outfield rises sharply at both ends just off the square.

On this day we have a bare 11 players and no umpire but luckily, a gentleman knocks on our dressing room door to offer to umpire for us. We gratefully accept and promise to buy him copious drinks after the match. A promise made perhaps a little too soon.

We hear that our opposition has two quality South African players. We are in the field and one South African opens the batting. I review our scant bowling line up and decide that John Bourne our occasional 3<sup>rd</sup> XI bowler will take the new ball against him. We know he can't bowl but hopefully they don't. The batsman lets 4 balls of the first over go by and hits the other two for 4. Following a maiden over at the other end the first ball of John Bourne's second over causes the South African batsman to rock onto the back foot – swish – nick – caught behind! Bledlow are in heaven until our new-found volunteer umpire declares him Not Out!

This batsman goes on to score a magnificent and classy 213 and we are set some 300 to win. Not impossible.

Willo and Dave Stone start us off. After 10 overs Dave has 6 and Willo has 80. On comes a spinner – Willo guesses this is the star South African spinner we have been warned about and proceeds to give the outrageous leave to anything wide and grind the ball into the turf if it is straight, the plan being to see this bowler off and assault the later bowlers – but from the pavilion we think to ourselves this bowler does not look that good! He is then taken off and the real South African spinner comes on. Willo has blocked the wrong spinner! Much merriment from the pavilion. Willo soon succumbs and chastises himself for not spanking the previous rubbish spinner and getting himself a 100 and us nearer to the large target, which ultimately proved to be out of reach.

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In addition to the above, his sporting prowess also included golf, where he got down to a creditable Handicap of single figures while playing with his good friend Barry at Winter Hill Golf Club.

He later joined the Woodworts Golf Society with ex High Wycombe Cricket and Hockey Club players where glimpses of his skills and power were there to be seen. On one occasion in recent years, after he had become a Driving Instructor, he decided to use a golf buggy to get around and managed to and park his golf buggy upside down in a ditch at Bird Hill Golf Club near Maidenhead, with him still in it.

The outcome was a sore foot but he played next week, with someone else acting as chauffeur in the buggy. Only Willo could have been standing on a slope behind the buggy, when it started to roll silently backwards and ran over his injured foot!

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Finally, to sum up - I want to say that we all play sport, not for a living, but for friendship and enjoyment. In all the years I have known Steve I have never heard him say a bad word about anyone – a rare quality.

Steve has given me, and I am sure all of you, so many fun memories to cherish and reasons to smile. I will miss my friend greatly.

R.I.P Steve.

**Gail:** Thank you. I think it was Ian Botham who said: "Whatever you do in cricket, enjoy it, be positive and try to win." A motto that could sum up Steve's attitude to life as well as to cricket.

Now we're going to hear a little more about Steve's life off the pitch in some words written by his son Ben, which are going to be read by his wife Kerry:

#### **Tribute from Ben Williams** (read by Kerry)

I wanted to pay a tribute to my dad today but didn't think I could read the words aloud, so I was very happy when my wife Kerry offered to read them for me.

For the last 25 years or so, myself and my dad had built a relationship that had continued to strengthen over the years. By the end of his life, not only was I the closest person to him, but I was touched to learn that I was the person who brought him the most comfort and reassurance. The reality is that prior to that we were not as close, as during my early years we didn't spend an awful lot of time together. On weekdays he was a salesman and on weekends he was a cricketer. I knew he was very good. I would look through scrapbooks of his cricketing achievements, as well as occasionally go over to Bledlow on matchday, although admittedly, as a child I found watching his performance with bat or ball less exciting than playing on the club pool table that he lined up with pound coins. I also saw plenty of evidence of his talents as a salesman.

For example, when I was 8 or perhaps 9, I was out for a few hours with dad and his friend Lawrence. I wanted them to play football with me, they wanted a beer. So, we find a field to play football, which was empty with the exception of some cows at one end, and sandwiched between the river and quite coincidentally, a pub. After around 5 minutes my dad looks over at the cows and we have the following conversation:

Dad: have you had enough yet?

Me: nope.

Dad: I don't think the cows like us playing here?

Me: I don't think they're bothered

Dad: Maybe it's just the bull that doesn't like it.

Me (now concerned): But I want to play football.

Dad: That's probably why the bull is unhappy.

Me: Why?

Dad: The football's Red. He won't like that. We should probably get away from him

Me: Can we go to that pub?

Dad: Well if you insist....

Being blessed with determination and a mind that could look for every opportunity to convince, especially when the reward was cricket or a pub, I can see why he became a salesman. Happily, I saw him use said determination to improve his life once he had become disenfranchised with the world of sales and longed for a life away from suits and ties and the trappings of an office. After a spell as a postman which did wonders for his increasingly middle-aged waistline, I was extremely impressed to witness him study, grind and soon after, become a fully qualified driving instructor. Whilst not being as physically rewarding as a life as a postie, it was without doubt the most mentally rewarding thing he ever did.

After his divorce, dad by his own admission, realised that he hadn't developed as strong a relationship with me as he would have liked, and set about putting that right. We always met every week, which continued into my adult life until I moved to Devon in my late twenties. We always stayed in touch on the phone between visits. As already mentioned today, dad shared a passion for card games and that was very much passed down to me. As a child we would play two-handed bridge and variations of 'whist', alongside board games, cricket, pool and despite him not being much of a fan, football so long as the necessary cows and pub were at hand.

As a teenager we would almost exclusively play crib and this continued until when I was about twenty, when we both separately learnt of a game called crash which we both loved. Once we both realised that we each knew how to play the game, that was it. We never played anything else whenever we got together. When the pandemic hit and everyone was shut indoors, I found a website that allowed to play crash virtually, which we played 3, 4 even 5 times a week. Up until the end of December just gone, we racked up over 500 odd hours in just a few years and would always have a catch up after the game, usually with one of us cursing the other about their luck that day. Dad would often say how much these games meant to him, and I'm grateful we had something available that allowed us to keep playing even when we had to stay home or when his discomfort meant he couldn't leave the flat. Aside from being fun, it probably did wonders in keeping his brain ticking over. I'm going to really miss those games.

When he visited, aside from the obligatory games of cards we would occasionally go for a few drinks. Anyone who's been out for a few drinks with my dad knows it can be a... what's the word.... interesting experience. When I first moved to Devon we went out to a local pub where I was starting to meet some of the locals and hoping to continue making positive first impressions. It took around 3 pints and 55 minutes for Dad to make a striking first impression of his own. Whilst I was chatting to a few people in a group of about 20 locals in the small beer garden, Dad, now rosy checked and having entered the unpredictable phase I recognized as "Confident Steve" struts up to a woman in the group and loudly exclaims "I hope you don't mind me saying, but you have an incredible pair of tits!".

Because of course he did make an impression. Because if there's one thing, we all know about my dad, is that the filter switch went missing somewhere along the way, assuming there ever was one to begin with. There've been a few times I haven't been sure whether to laugh or hold my head in my hands, and I doubt I'm alone. If truth be told I'm not entirely sure what impression I made that night but over the following few weeks, people kept asking me "so when is your dad visiting again?!"

Aside from being blessed with this knack for the unsubtle, he also possessed many other big characteristics as, big characters do. He always wanted other people to be happy. He always wanted other people to laugh, even if it wasn't always the appropriate time to crack a joke. I always found that, despite his competitive nature, he was a great sport and in my personal experience, took defeats well (although maybe his cricket and golf friends have a different view of this)! He had a good work ethic that was matched by an equal thirst for play, and although the latter maybe made him sometimes less suitable for the role of a family man, it did make him a good friend and team-mate. People often spoke of his good heart, and he always wanted to know how other people were, even when riddled with his own health problems. This combined with a brain that could occasionally, for want of a better phrase, go "AWOL", meant that if he did or said something insensitive, he could dwell and worry on it for weeks or even months. I believe it's not the insensitive things we do that define us, but whether we care and regret that we did them. His heart would always win.

Finally, as we leave the service today, it felt important to me that it will be to 'Free bird' by Lynyrd Skynyrd.

This song stands particularly close to my heart as when I first showed an interest in music, this was the first song that dad showed me, as I had to check out the amazing guitar solo. We sat and listened to the full ten odd minutes and suffice to say, I was very impressed. I will always have fond memories of this song because of it.

But I also want this song, as the lyrics are so fitting and poignant as well. Firstly, the opening line: "If I leave here tomorrow, would you still remember me?". I think we can agree that, thanks to that larger-than-life personality, once you have met him, you were extremely unlikely to ever forget him. So even though he has now left here, I think we can also all agree that to know Steve Williams is to remember Steve Williams.

And secondly the songs hook line: "I'm as free as a bird now, and this bird you'll never change." Whether you class it as having courage in his convictions and determination, or perhaps, just bloody stubborn, he was a bird that never changed who he was. Ultimately, it proved to be his undoing. Over the years he had everyone from family to wonderful friends and kind neighbours (thanks Dale), urge him to quit smoking,

unfortunately without success. He also had an insatiable sweet tooth. Unfortunately, being the slightly reckless optimist that he was, he believed that instead of making changes to his lifestyle, he could just take an ever-increasing number of tablets prescribed by his doctor, convinced that they were solely a magic remedy and not just masking his symptoms, to the point where his prescriptive med' collection would fill up the kitchen surface space, not taken by desserts. If there's one thing his passing has taught me, it is never to put your faith in the pharmacist over the greengrocer. On the occasions I encouraged him to maybe just half his 40 a day cigarette habit, and perhaps try to just have one portion of dessert rather than two, he would often say, "well I don't want to live like a monk Ben!". Exasperated, by the end I would often reply how much I would love to meet these supposed monks that he speaks of that unhappily struggle on with a just a single pudding and only one daily pack of B and H. He would always chuckle though, as he could always have a laugh, even if it was at himself.

But even if he couldn't change, after years of declining health, a lockdown and his frustrations at his decreased mobility and worsening aches and pains that just wouldn't abate, I think we can all take comfort in the fact that for the first time in a long time, Steve is a bird that is truly free.

### **Closing music: Free Bird – Lynyrd Skynyrd**

#### **A TRIBUTE FROM HIGH WYCOMBE RUGBY CLUB as it appeared on the Club's Website**

Steve Williams, known as "Willo" to almost everyone who knew him in the 70s and 80s as a player and thereafter as a supporter of the club, has passed away aged 68.

His gradually declining health was clear to see in recent years, so those who had not known him long might not be aware that in his playing days he was a prodigiously talented sportsman whose performances could veer from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again.

He played full back for the 1st XV for a while in the mid-1970s and thereafter appeared at full back and occasionally at scrum half in a strong 2nd XV before displaying his multiple talents in the lower sides. He could win you or lose you a match quicker than you could say "Finn Russell" but when he was on song his enormous and exaggerated sidestep or explosive kicking was a wonder to behold. He was years ahead of his time in at least one respect as he could make lengthy kicks down the right touchline bend away to the right off his right foot. One of his great attributes was that his teammates often had little idea what he was going to do next and for this reason he was also known as "Coco" in honour of the once-famous circus clown, but it meant that the opposition had no chance of reading him either! Stories about Willo's feats on the pitch are legion but here is just one:

At Staines RUFC, with a strong breeze behind us he fielded an opposition kick which did not quite make touch. Staines could reasonably have expected we would not score as a result of this minor failing. We were behind our 10 yard line when Steve caught the ball. He took a quick look up and then his drop kick sailed over the posts, over a 25 metre dead ball line and cleared a high wire security fence beyond. The look on the opposition's faces were worthy of the kick.

For a while he ran the "A" team, which was really a 3rd XV in disguise and whose purpose was to develop younger players. He was unfailingly generous in his encouragement of these younger players and in his desire to promote them to higher teams.

He was also an occasionally erratic, but often brilliant cricketer, spending most of his career at Bledlow CC where he has legendary status. He was a prolific batsman, and a bowler who could spin a googly further than any other bowler on earth. Though not obviously athletic his prodigious talents extended to fielding that could be extraordinary and catching that could be remarkable.

A kind man, who occasionally divided opinion with his exploits on the pitch and opinions off it, he did not lose the twinkle in his eye or his tendency to mischief and the odd practical joke. Always friendly and welcoming he had plenty of ideas about what in the world needed to be put to rights and was willing to share these with any and all.

His health deteriorated suddenly last week and the final whistle was blown on Thursday morning. He will be missed, but will be talked about for a long time to come.

R.I.P. Willo

## **SPORTING AND OTHER ANECDOTES**

Stories about Steve are legion and probably everyone that ever knew him will have their own (remarkable and probably very funny) Willo story – here are a few:

### **RUGBY**

Willo was well known for sidestepping and for kicking, in particular dropped goals of the sort described in the tribute by High Wycombe Rugby Club. Not all of his feats were quite as successful but they were often just as noteworthy for different reasons.

#### **The Kick for Touch (with panic)** (Nic Collins)

Nic Collins captained High Wycombe 2<sup>nd</sup> XV away at Maidenhead on a very wet and miserable afternoon. Towards the end of the game as the pitch became increasingly muddy and the weather increasingly cold, the players became increasingly fed up. Wycombe won a penalty near their own try line and Steve was instructed to “Stick it on the A308” in the hope that the ball would not be easily retrieved and that the referee would blow the final whistle.

Steve took an extended break to clean the ball which he did on his captain’s shirt. This irritated the referee who gave his whistle a strong blast and warned Steve that he would be penalised for time-wasting. Steve’s response was to panic, whereupon (in Nic’s words!) he kicked the ball powerfully “up the ref’s arse”!

#### **The Kick for Touch (with sidestepping)** (Nic Collins)

In another match, playing on the old college pitch opposite John Hampden School, High Wycombe’s opposition kicked the ball forward and Steve collected it a few yards in front of the 25 yard-line (which was what the “22” was called in those days).

Rather than keep the ball in play by counter-attacking or by kicking to keep the ball in play, Steve decided to trot back to the “25” and kick the ball out, which you could do in those days and still gain ground at the ensuing lineout. Seeing this, his teammates ambled back slowly to roughly where the ball might end up. Steve took too long and was closed down by some opponents whereupon he went into jinking mode, bobbing and weaving this way and that, but generally in a backwards direction until he found himself behind his own try-line. At this point his side-step went into forward gear, he escaped his opponents, sprinted to where he had first retrieved the ball outside the “25” and kicked the ball out direct so we ended up with a lineout where the whole episode had begun!

#### **The Kick for Touch (with the “mark”)** (Steve Gamester)

Our opposition missed a penalty for goal and Willo caught the ball behind our own goal line. Instead of taking the easy option (when did he ever do that?) and touch the ball down he decided to kick for touch from beneath the posts.

He sliced his kick and hit the right-hand post high up, on its way up. On its way down, the ball hit the crossbar and fell back into the in-goal area. Willo was inevitably once again beneath the falling ball and as he caught it, he shouted “mark”. “Marks” were only ever given from kicks by the opposition because it was not usual for teams to kick the ball to their teammates behind their own goal line! As a result, when the ref blew the whistle he had no idea what decision to make.

### **CRICKET**

Everyone who has played cricket with or against Willo will have their own stories. Here are just a few:-

#### **Running a Batsman out with his Heel** (John Rolfe)

Sometime in the late 70s, Bledlow played a Sunday cricket match at High Wycombe and Steve was bowling by the time a new Wycombe player called Tony Ward came out to bat. Tony had moved to the Wycombe area from Guildford where he had played as wicket-keeper-batsmen for their strong side and having failed to score runs for Wycombe in his first game, was keen to get going and make a good impression.

He pushed the ball to midwicket where Chris Johnson was fielding and set off for a risky single. Chris threw the ball low and very fast, but quite inaccurately so Tony Ward was going to be safe, but as the ball whizzed between Steve and the stumps, he half-volleyed this tracer bullet backwards with his heel with perfect timing, so that stumps and bails flew everywhere with the batsman far out of his ground. Only Steve could have thought about doing this, let alone carried it out.

High Wycombe CC never saw Tony Ward again. What Steve did that day finished him off! and he went to seek his cricketing fortunes elsewhere.

### **The Googly** (Chris Johnson)

Bledlow were playing Great Kingshill in the National Village Competition. Bledlow had batted first and made a decent score, but in reply Kingshill had made a good start and neither opening bowler had taken a wicket. Captain Chris Johnson put Willo on to bowl which was always something of a gamble but somehow or other he often provided a wicket. He didn't disappoint: his first delivery was appalling, so short it bounced twice and was almost rolling along the ground when it passed the batsman who took a swish at it but missed and, quite rightly, the umpire signalled no-ball. The second was only marginally better, a half-tracker which the batsman, eager to take advantage of this awful bowling, tried to dispatch to the boundary but instead hit straight to John Davies at mid-wicket who took the catch.

The substantial figure of Garth Free strode to the wicket. Garth was the Kingshill captain a renowned batsman and prodigious run-scorer in village cricket and mainstay of the Kingshill batting. He'd probably never faced Willo. Shane Warne would have been proud of Willo's next delivery, a perfect leg-break pitching around leg stump, turning and bouncing, and beating Free's outside edge and fizzing past his off-stump. A surprised and slightly concerned Garth prodded the pitch and awaited the next ball. This pitched around off-stump, another leg-break which again beat Free's forward defensive but this time passed well wide of his off-stump. Next delivery was even wider, spun sharply away, was left alone by the batsman and called (rather harshly) a wide by the umpire. A now annoyed Willo hustled in and bowled a ball which pitched even wider still. Garth Free raised his bat, disdainfully stood back from the stumps and was already looking at the umpire anticipating another wide when Willo's googly turned a yard and rattled into his off-stump. Needless to say Bledlow went on to win comfortably.

### **Willo “Blocking”** (John Rolfe)

Although a powerful and usually destructive batsman, Willo could retreat into his own shell and often for no reason. This story about Willo blocking, relates to a game at Bledlow's ground (perhaps an October game) where he blocked and blocked (his forward defensive was a rather unattractive smother as opposed to an elegant forward defensive) until Slices appeared on the boundary and gave him some stick.

They had a conversation over a distance of 70 yards and Willo called out "*Thank you Robin*" in an annoyed-come-sarcastic way. The outcome was a devastating onslaught on the bowlers. The ball disappeared into and over all parts and everyone was left wondering why he hadn't done this before.

### **Willo’s Throwing Arm**

Steve had a formidable but often erratic throwing arm. I played a Wednesday game at Ealing for High Wycombe in '72 or '73 and one of our players was Alan Huntley, then probably in his late 30s or early 40s. I had met Alan once by that time (I had just started at HW), he was a very good cricketer and he had volunteered to umpire a Colts match in which I bowled at his end. He offered encouragement and was soft-spoken, mild and extremely courteous... very Old School.

A Wednesday game at Ealing came soon after and was the second time I had met the mild-mannered Alan Huntley. Willo chased the ball to the boundary as the batsmen ran a regulation two or three and then just because he could I suppose, Willo released a howitzer from 60 or 70 yards which went over the middle of the wicket and cleared the head of the keeper who came out in a desperate attempt to stop it. Being a good cricketer Alan had backed up and had backed up some distance beyond the 'keeper. The ball rapped his hands with a huge thwack. As he wrung his hands in pain, Alan called out "You're bloody mad Williams". Only Willo could have achieved this outburst from Alan who I subsequently played a lot of cricket with without ever seeing him lose his temper again.

For all that Willo could get very frustrated with himself and with others, I remember many acts of kindness:

### **Encouraging Young Cricketers** – Three examples as remembered by John Rolfe

1) Steve captained an unbeaten HWCC U17s (Colts) team in 1970 including a home match in which I was playing. My 10-year-old brother Alastair had come down with me to watch. It turned out that we were a man short. Steve said that Alastair must play and despite my apprehension he insisted and made arrangements for someone to go to our house to collect his kit. Alastair took the field with 16 and 17-year-olds in white shorts and white kit and fielded throughout the opposition's innings. As it happens, even though Steve put him to field mostly in safe positions behind the bat, the ball seemed to follow Alastair around and he experienced the thrill of playing cricket for the first time with much older teammates.

2) Almost 30 years later, I was playing a match at Bledlow and my family came along. My elder son Samuel would have been about 10 at that time, pretty much the same age that my brother had been that day at High Wycombe. Steve was no longer playing, but as ever he was at the ground to watch. It turned out that we

were short of a scorer, so Steve sat down with Samuel and spent much of the afternoon teaching him how to score.

3) Finally, in between these occasions, on a wonderfully warm May Bank Holiday Monday in 1978, 22 players, turned up with wives and girlfriends and picnics, and picked teams for a friendly but highly competitive match. The weather was almost perfect, and this was one of those days you look back on with nostalgia as being as near to perfection as you were ever likely to reach.

Steve captained one of the sides and during the second innings brought the youngest player on the pitch, on to bowl. Robin Baker (not yet "Slices") would have been twelve or thirteen. He was shy and nervous (yes it's hard to believe!) and I imagine he may have been playing his first adult game. He bowled very well although not surprisingly, from time-to-time his bowling was hit for a few runs and from occasionally he looked anxiously at Willo for reassurance. Willo had a word with him and told him to stop worrying, that he was not going to be taken off and that he should just carry on bowling and enjoy it. He bowled about 12 overs without a break.

## **GOLF**

### **Willo and the Impossible (Chris Johnson)**

Willo was a keen and talented golfer but, as with the other sports he played, occasionally fluctuated between ineptitude and genius worthy of a Ballesteros, Woods or McIlroy, sometimes on the same hole! Playing at Wentworth one day he was several holes up on me but on one hole, a par 4, he topped his drive which scuttled little more than 50 yards into a bank of heather. I found the fairway with my drive and was now confident of winning this hole and cutting his lead. Willo's ball took some finding, lying deep in thick and woody undergrowth and probably unplayable. Frankly, if had been me I'd have returned to the tee and replayed the drive. The other, riskier, alternative would have been to use a sand wedge, try to blast it out and (hopefully) reach the start of the fairway. Willo, rather like Ballesteros came up with another, ludicrous, option. To my astonishment he took out his driver and attempted a shot that I was certain to be doomed to failure. The ball sailed out of the heather and flew well over 200 yards down the fairway. Willo found the green with his third shot and sank the putt for a par 4. Unfortunately, I could only manage a bogey 5 and slipped yet another hole behind.

### **Willo and Golf Buggies (Liz Keens)**

Steve had been badgering me for a long time to join our golfing group, without success. Steve eventually took the easier route and stated pestering Graham which is how he got to be playing at Nettlebed and driving a buggy. By this time Steve was a Driving Instructor. He managed to not only turn the buggy over, but also to trap his foot which had to be set free.

A few weeks later he was sharing a buggy on the course at Nettlebed with Mike Britnell who also had a damaged foot. Mike was the designated driver and unfortunately left the buggy on a slope to play a shot and failed to engage the brake properly. The buggy started to roll backwards and with one of life's inevitabilities it ran back straight over Steve's injured foot

### **Willo and Exposure on the Golf Course (Liz Keens)**

On another occasion we were playing at Weston Turville and had reached a green located very close to the next tee but with a few bushes in the way. Willo decided to have a waz in these bushes, totally unaware that he was in clear view of the entire Whiteleaf Ladies team. We played the next tee and very soon someone came out to talk to the group as complaints had been made to the club's management. Eventually our group returned to the clubhouse to find Whiteleaf Ladies already there. There was only one subject of conversation in the room, so much so that we felt we had to sit outside. After I while I felt that an apology might help and went inside to make peace with the ladies. They seemed satisfied with my explanation: "Quite honestly he's grown a bit portly and hasn't seen it himself for a few years!"

## **SQUASH (Chris Johnson)**

Willo was probably never a regular squash player but being blessed with excellent hand-eye coordination displayed plenty of ability in his occasional games. It's no surprise that someone who could kick a rugby ball, throw a cricket ball and drive a golf ball further than almost anyone else could also hit a squash ball harder than most others as well and if he happened to find a length with these power hits, he could prove a difficult opponent.

Only for a short while however because what he lacked (probably not helped by many years of heavy smoking) was stamina and I, a regular competitive player of a good club standard, would always eventually beat him even if I occasionally lost the first game.

Except for once! We usually played at Henley where I would book the court for an hour but on one occasion Willo made a booking and we played at Court Garden in Marlow. Willo played well in the first game finding the nick and back corners with regularity and narrowly beat me. No matter, I thought, he'll be running out of puff shortly, I'll take the second game and subsequent games will become a formality. But shortly into game two there was a knock on the squash court door and our time was up. I hadn't realised that at Court Garden at that time squash court bookings were in blocks of twenty minutes.

Willo had only booked for twenty minutes and so, in effect, he had won!

### **SURFING** (Chris Johnson)

As we know, Willo had a talent for many sports, sometimes a wayward talent but a talent nonetheless but it's probably safe to say that surfing wasn't one of these sports. In fact it wouldn't surprise me if the following doesn't document his one and only attempt but it just wouldn't be Willo if even this didn't turn out to be memorable.

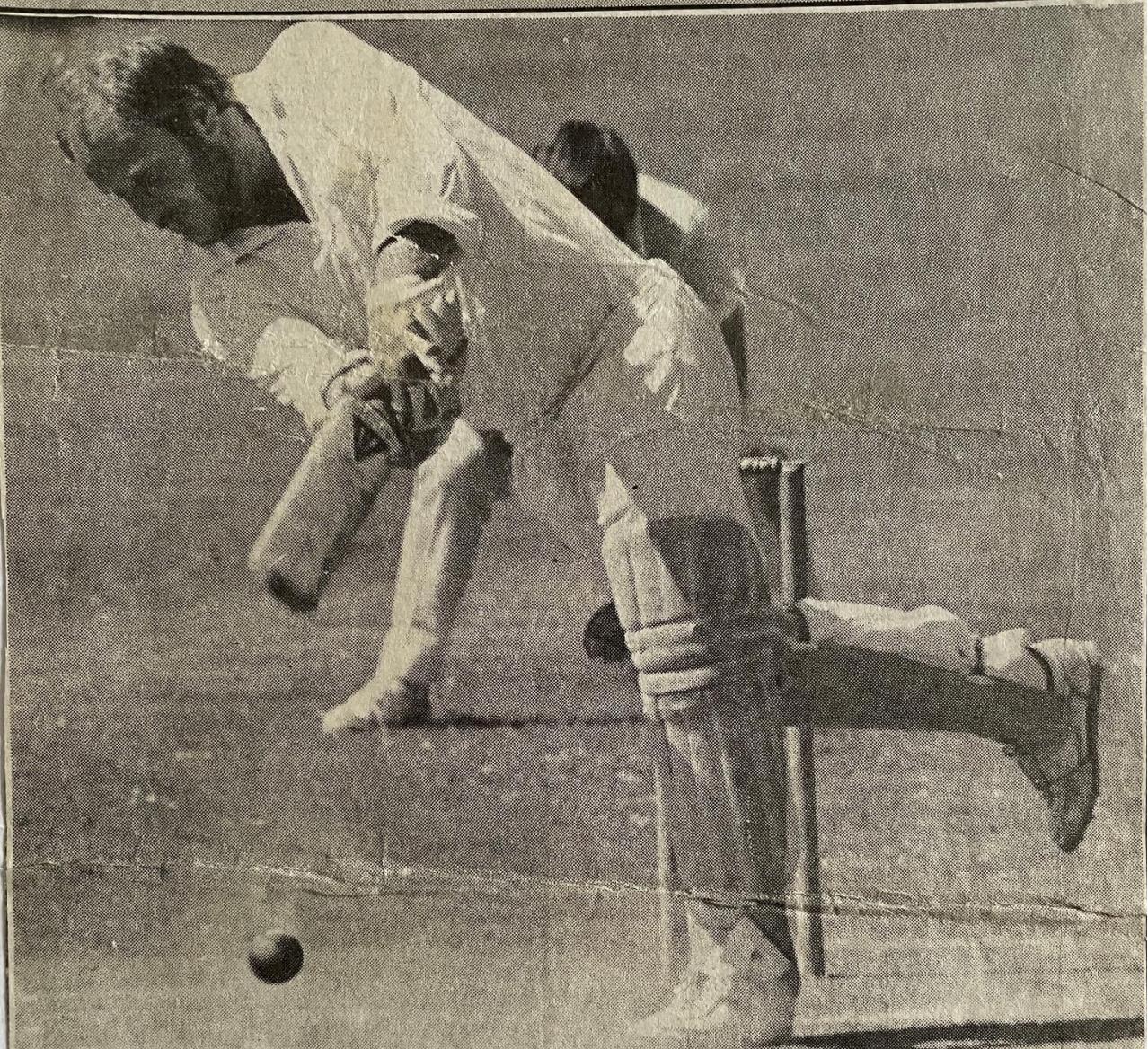
A Bledlow cricket tour to Ilfracombe had just ended and that morning most of the team were heading home. However, a group of us decided to take advantage of some lovely summer weather and spend a day on a beach before heading back to Buckinghamshire. We drove to a remote beach in the very north of Cornwall and all went into the sea. There was a good surf running but we only had one surfboard between five of us and so it was shared around.

It's sod's law that it was when Willo had his turn that something remarkable happened that despite spending many hours on Cornish beaches down the years I'd never experienced before or since. As Willo made his way seaward with the board a wave appeared on the horizon that was not only bigger than any we'd seen so far - it was MASSIVELY bigger! We shouted and alerted Willo who, gamely, prepared to try and ride it but as it reached him the huge wave began to break and lifted Willo and the board high into the air before crashing them both down into a cauldron of seething surf. The wave then knocked the rest of us over as well and also bundled us all along the sea bed before we emerged coughing, spluttering and spitting out seawater. Willo emerged as well in a similar state but the surfboard, despite being of sturdy and resilient construction, was snapped clean in two as if it had been a matchstick.

*Note: The spelling of Willow or Willo seems to vary according to the writer. For the sake of consistency, the latter has been used through this booklet. No offence meant to anyone who thinks it should be "Willow"!*



# **Knockout win for Bledlow**



■ Bledlow's Steve Williams attacks the Kimble bowling in Sunday's Bucks final of the Norsk Hydro National Village Knockout Cup. The final result was a win for Bledlow in dramatic circumstances. For full report and scorecard see p92.