

A Ceremony to Celebrate the Life of Peter Leonard Rowlands

(10 February 1944 – 1 July 2025)



29 July 2025

Swansea Crematorium

Opening Music

I'll Be Seeing You – Billie Holiday

Welcome

Hello and a very warm welcome. As you all know, we have come here today to celebrate the life of Peter Rowlands and to say goodbye.

My name is Brigid Haines and I am a celebrant accredited with Humanists UK. I am honoured to lead this ceremony today.

Peter, Pete to many of you, was a wonderful husband and granddad, a true socialist, and a loyal and trusted friend to many.

We make space today for your grief that this good man has gone. Space too to enjoy remembering what was special about Pete by sharing stories about him, hearing about his life and his values. We will also pause for quiet reflection where you can think about your own personal memories of him in whatever context you knew him: as family, friend or comrade. And in the days and months to come, thoughts of your time with Pete will accompany you always.

Tribute

Peter Rowlands was born in 1944 in London. His parents were Leonard, who was in the army when Peter was born, and Sue. He recalled a happy childhood, growing up with his younger brother Anthony on Daws Farm in Essex where their father became the farm manager.

Anthony and Peter both attended King Edward VI Grammar School in Chelmsford. Pete was the bugle sergeant in the school Corps of Drums, which he developed to become a jazz trumpeter in his popular band, The Chelmer Jazzmen. He also had a skiffle group, The Hot Five, though jazz was his first love.

Pete's parents wanted him to try for Oxbridge but, strangely enough for someone so bright, he failed Latin, a requirement for entry, not once but twice (could it have been deliberate?), and so went to the LSE. Here, he met fellow student Mick Jagger, and once invited Mick to join his band. Who can say what the future might have been had Jagger accepted?

Pete's first job was as a lecturer in Economics at Glamorgan College of Technology, before he moved to Hounslow to work in a further education college.

In 1987 he met Janice, who was working in the same college as secretary to the Principal, and they were married in 1991. In 2003 they moved to Swansea, partly to look after Pet's mother, Sue, and made their home here.

Pete has five grandchildren, Adele, Hayley, Lauren, Martin and Abigail, who enjoyed his company even though he did always ask them about school and books! Pete treasured the memories he made with the grandchildren, paddling at Blackpill, on the pedalos in Singleton Park, the Winter Wonderland, and of course, ten pin bowling.

During the 1990s, Peter and Janice had a small cottage in France, where he developed a love of snails and frogs' legs. Of course, these had to have the appropriate wine to go with the dish. Pete knew his wines, and they loved to visit vineyards and co-operatives when in France. At home, he would always read the Observer's wine recommendations. Pete was fond of a good wine right up to the day he died. He would often ask Janice, 'What are we having for dinner today?', which really meant 'Red or white tonight?'.

He also loved real ale and was a member of CAMRA. When still in London, they had a small boat on the Thames, where they would enjoy travelling from pub to pub on the river.

He also loved to dance. He was very sociable, and at college functions he was always first on the dance floor.

Pete's mum loved to sail, and when they moved to Swansea Pete had a small sailing boat based at Loughor. This was short-lived though after he ran aground and had to call out the volunteer coastguards.

Pete threw himself into Swansea life. Though English despite his Welsh surname, he was a great lover of Dylan Thomas and would often recite some of his poems. As a lover of jazz, Pete used to frequent the St James Jazz Club in Uplands. He was a member of the Gower Society, Swansea Local History group, the National Trust, and CADW. He loved exploring stately homes and finding out about the rich industrial history of Swansea. At college in Hounslow he had often taken his colleagues on history walks – which always ended in a pub of course – and in Swansea, he was soon taking Janice on history walks, something she then continued to do for Cockett WI.

Pete was always political, with an eye always for helping the underdog, which he had the patience to do. He would help anyone and frequently did. As a young man for example he would sometimes pay other people's gas bills if they were in need. In his youth he was a member of the Young Socialists. In 1972, he joined the Labour Party and served as a local councillor in Hounslow from 1994-1998. He also stood for parliament twice. He was an avid reader of the Guardian and New Statesman and regularly wrote articles for The Chartist. In Swansea, he was a volunteer for Citizens Advice. It is good to know that recently, some Labour posters from the 1960s and 70s were found under his bed, and Niamh, stepdaughter of Steve, Janice's son, was able to use them in her fourth year dissertation on Art in Socialism.

I'll finish with some of the things his friends have posted as tributes online:

Loyal and trusted friend.

A huge figure in the Labour movement.

Always good contributions to our debates and discussions.

One of the mainstays of Sketty Ward Labour Party.

Greatly respected for his tireless devotion and commitment to his socialist principles.

His moral compass, integrity and intellect shone out of him. He will be sorely missed by us all.

A gentleman and a scholar. He made a massive contribution to the Labour Party, Swansea Labour Left, and Welsh Labour Grassroots. His contribution to the Labour Party was huge over many decades. He will be greatly missed but never forgotten. A great socialist.

Music for Reflection

We will pause now for a moment of quiet reflection.

You can be alone with your memories of Pete, have a laugh or a cry or say a quiet prayer if that is right for you.

Air on a G String – Johann Sebastian Bach

Poetry Reading

We'll listen now to Peter's favourite writer, Dylan Thomas, reading his own poem, Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Committal

The time has come to say goodbye to Peter. If you are able, would you please stand.

To everything there is a season, a time to be born, and a time to die. A time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Peter's memory is safely held in your hearts and minds. Memories of your time with him will accompany you always. His body will return to nature.

We commit his body to its natural end, and we say goodbye.

Rest in peace, Peter.

Closing Words

Peter was much loved. If you feel sad in the days and months to come, remember that grief is the price you pay for love, and that love lives on.

If any of you wish to make a donation in Peter's name, the charity chosen by Janice is the Sketty Food Bank, an organisation close to Peter's heart.

You are all warmly invited after this ceremony to come to The Welcome Inn for refreshments and more stories about Peter.

I would like to leave you with a Celtic farewell:

The peace of the running water to you
The peace of the flowing air to you
The peace of the quiet earth to you
And the love and care of us all to you.

Closing Music

Calon Lân – Treorchy Male Voice Choir

Funeral Director: St James

Celebrant: Brigid Haines

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‘The more you encounter kindness, the better the world always is.’
Stephen Fry, Humanist

