



Kevin Pakenham (1947-2020): Our Founding Chairman

Author: [Peter Stanford](#) | 22 Jul 2020

There would be no Longford Trust without Kevin Pakenham. It is that simple. After his father's death in 2001, it was Kevin who gathered and galvanised the friends and family keen to see some lasting memorial to Frank Longford's lifelong work in prison reform. As those who have attended our annual lecture these past 18 years will know, having heard Kevin speak, as chairman, at the end of the evening, he was the trust's most effective fund-raiser.

“As last year,” he would begin, “my subject is money”.

His enthusiasm for the work of the trust, in all its aspects, was infectious. So hard did he prove to resist, that we have been able to grow and develop on a secure, expanding financial base for two decades.

It is, therefore, with enormous sadness and profound shock, that I write to announce the death of our much-loved chairman. He died on July 19, 2020, after a very brief illness. He was 72, in the full of life. Everyone I have spoken to in the days since cannot quite believe he is gone. He had the energy, enthusiasm and drive of a man half his age, and so many plans for the future.

Kevin leaves behind many things that he loved and nurtured: his wife of just short of two enormously happy years, Ronke; his children and stepchildren, Kate, Tom, Ben, Hermione, Dominic, James, Sebastian and Kiriem; his siblings Antonia, Thomas, Rachel and Michael; an enormous circle of friends of all ages and all backgrounds who cannot believe this charismatic, witty, clever, humane, generous man has been snatched from our midst; the thriving corporate finance advisory firm, Pakenham Partners, which he founded in 2011 as the continuation of a stellar career in the City of London; and a long list of charities and causes to which he unstintingly gave his time and resources throughout his life.

The Longford Trust was the most personal of these. Its inspiration was Kevin’s own father, and the maxim that he had followed throughout his long life in the public eye, that to deny the possibility of reform and rehabilitation to any individual prisoner is to deny not only their humanity but our own. Its work was something Kevin believed in passionately, following the lives and fortunes of the hundreds of young men and women we have supported over the past 20 years, always having time to talk about them or to them when they needed advice and encouragement that he could provide.

Many new charities, set up in memory of an outstanding individual, flourish briefly but lose momentum as time goes by. Because of Kevin’s wise counsel at every turn, because of his thorough-going commitment to everything that was happening under the trust’s aegis, because he was prepared to seek out the donations required to make the stated goals of rehabilitation and second chances a reality, the Longford Trust has for two decades thrived and grown and changed lives and attitudes. In all of that Kevin, too, was a truly outstanding man and will be much missed. What we will continue to achieve will be another part of his legacy.

For those who want to read more about Kevin's life, a full obituary was published in the Daily Telegraph on July 24. It is available (behind the paywall) by clicking [here](#). Or can be read below.

We remember him and his grieving family in our thoughts and prayers. Eternal rest grant unto him, and may perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.

Peter Stanford, Director

*

Daily Telegraph Obituaries Page, Saturday July 25, 2020

Kevin Pakenham

City executive and author who followed his father Lord Longford into the field of prison reform

Kevin Pakenham, who has died suddenly at 72, sustained a high-profile career in the City of London over five decades, but the youngest son of the Labour cabinet minister and penal reformer, Lord Longford, refused to conform to stereotypes and ranged widely in a vivid life that was lived to the full, embracing literature, politics and, latterly, his own tireless work for prisoners.

*Youngest children in large families sometimes have to fight to make their voices heard, as he found growing up the eighth of eight in what was usually referred to as a political or a literary clan, his mother the acclaimed historical biographer, Elizabeth Longford. If his parents set the bar high, his brothers and sisters also gave him much to live up to. In 1969, when he was still at university, his oldest sibling, Antonia Fraser, published her biography of Mary Queen of Scots, his brother Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty*, a study of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and another sister, Rachel Billington, *All Things Nice*, the first of her 22 novels.*

While he was always enjoyed a political debate, using his considerable wit to play devil's advocate, he was only once, in the early 1980s, moved to throw his hat into the party political ring, when he stood unsuccessfully as an SDP candidate in local elections. His old friend Charles Moore characterises his political views as "anarchic conservative",

and that description applied equally to social conventions. When his theatre producer daughter Kate married, he insisted on traditional tails for the men, but walked her down the aisle pairing his own with shoes but no socks, and a panama hat.

The written word exercised a more profound hold on him. As a PPE student at New College, Oxford, in the Swinging Sixties, he founded Cover, a university magazine. In its pages, he published the first draft of "History", a poem by Philip Larkin that opened with the much-quoted line, "Sexual intercourse began/In nineteen sixty three..." (It was later to be renamed "Annus Mirabilis" when it appeared in Larkin's collection High Windows.)

Even after 1972, when he was busy making a name for himself in the global asset management industry, he continued to write for his own satisfaction. In the late 1990s, approached by a publisher about becoming another "literary Longford", he asked – sending himself up when telling the story – what subjects attracted the most book-buyers. Cats and golf, came the reply. So he wrote A Gathering Bunker in 1996, and A Green Too Far in 1998, funny tales from the fairways, a favourite haunt of his, along with the tennis court.

And in the months before his death, with the help of his third wife, the award-winning ITN correspondent, Ronke Phillips, he had been putting together a collection of his own poems. It will be published in November as Songs of Love.

Though there was no great family connection with the world of finance, his decision to opt for a career in the City after doing postgraduate studies in economics at St Antony's College, Oxford, could be seen as a rebellion against all that his parents had instilled in him. He liked jokingly to describe himself as the only right-winger in a left-wing family. It was more complicated.

There were, of course, practical considerations. He had a family to support. More significantly, he enjoyed the competitive cut and thrust of the markets, and was highly accomplished at it, passing his enthusiasm on to his son Ben, who has followed in his footsteps.

Kevin John Toussaint Pakenham was born in 1947 in north London. He was educated at St Philip's, a Catholic prep school in Kensington (his parents were both converts), and then he followed his brothers Thomas, Paddy and Michael to Ampleforth College, the Catholic Eton.

1969 was a traumatic year for the whole family, with the death, in a car crash, of his journalist sister, Catherine. She was his next sibling up, and the two were close. He told one of his sons that for a period afterwards he would cry himself to sleep. Her loss had a profound influence on him. If he inherited from his parents a strong sense of the value of hard work and making your mark in the world, then there was also in his make-up ever after Catherine's death a determination energetically to live life to the full. It gave him an ageless quality, forever relishing new ideas, new challenges, never stuck in any groove or era.

His career in the financial world, where his work in particular focused on eastern Europe, saw him hold senior positions at Rothschild Intercontinental Bank, Ivory & Sime, American Express Bank, and F & C Management before he became from 1988 chief executive of the fund manager, John Govett and Co, and from 1996 of AIB Asset Management. In 2000, he joined Putnam Lovell, and from 2007 was managing director of Jeffries International. In 2011, with his usual audacity, he started Pakenham Partners, his own corporate finance advisory firm. In recent weeks it had been celebrating the successful completion of the latest two in its long list of major deals.

His first marriage, shortly after leaving university, to the film and TV producer, Ruth Jackson, ended in 1984 after they had had two children together. Shortly afterwards, he married Clare Hoare, whose novels are published as Clare Harkness, with whom he had three children. It, too, ended in divorce.

In 2016, he met Ronke Phillips at a charity auction. He won her round by bidding over the odds for a painting she liked, and then presenting it to her. They married in September 2018 at St Bride's Church on Fleet Street. In the acknowledgements to his forthcoming book of poems, he offers his thanks to "all those who have travelled the stormy seas, and particularly my wife Ronke, who has mastered the swell". The couple would sail his much-loved boat, Cheetah, out of Rye, cheerfully enduring many near disasters in the process. He had, his lifelong friends said, found his soul mate.

Alongside his career in the City, and his writing, he shared his family's long-standing commitment to making society a better place, as a trustee and treasurer of the Ireland Fund of Great Britain from 1989 to 2009, and from 2002 as the founding chairman of the Longford Trust, set up to continue his father's commitment to rehabilitation as part of his high profile mission as a prison reformer. As fund-raiser in chief, his unceasing efforts sustained the trust's pioneering work in supporting hundreds of ex-prisoners through university into careers.

If asked, he would have played down his part as “just the money man”. For all his love of impromptu speech-making, he was at heart a modest, self-effacing man, happiest when spending time with his children and grandchildren, going for long walks, cold-water skinny-dipping, or quietly exploring an ever-expanding list of new challenges, most recently producing the pen- and-ink drawing that will accompany Songs of Love, which is dedicated to his late sister, the poet Judith Kazantzis.

He is survived by his children and stepchildren.

Kevin John Toussaint Pakenham, financier, writer and philanthropist, born 1 November 1947, died July 19, 2020

[← Go Back](#)