
Obituary: Christopher Richardson

3rd October 1947-29th October 2020

By *People's Histreh – Nottingham Radical History Group*, Nottingham, November 2020.



With great sadness do we report on the death of our friend and comrade Chris Richardson, committed Socialist, proud fighter for LGBTQ+ liberation, accomplished historian and author of *A City of Light...*

In light of the Covid-19 crisis, Chris' partner Richard McCance and several close friends have decided to hold an event celebrating Chris' life at a time when people can get together again without undue risk.

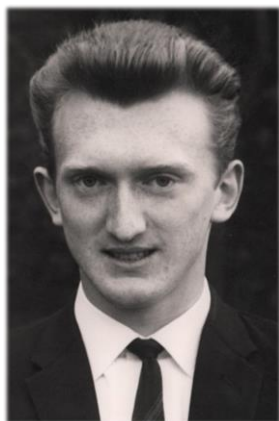
If you wish to take part in the preparations or to be kept up to date with those plans, please contact: info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk

Chris was born in South London on October 3rd 1947. He was the only child of the joiner Arthur and the shirt maker Enid Richardson.

Chris passed the 11+ examinations and got a place at Tiffin Boys Grammar School. Although Chris later made a friend for life there, bonding over a shared interest in politics, he struggled to connect to many of the other pupils. The inevitable pain and angst of growing up was worsened by becoming aware that he was a gay man, living in a deeply homophobic society.

By the latter half of the 1960s Chris had gone off to Warwick University to study history and politics. Before long he ran the projector at the University Film Club and got involved in campaigns against the Vietnam War.

Cinematography was a lifelong interest, and Chris began to capture footage documenting those years. Surviving records include [shots of his dorm room](#), a characteristically neat and highly organised space featuring some Maoist and NLF propaganda, a radio which could receive Radio Tirana, and a cheese plant that apparently continued to be Chris' companion for the rest of his days. We have to thank Enid for pushing her son into modelling a graduation gown, resulting in [colour film of a very young Chris looking slightly embarrassed in his fancy hat](#), which likely clashed with his sense of dressing sharply.



In the summer of 1967 Chris went on vacation to the USSR, venturing beyond the British Isles for the first time, also making stops in Warsaw and Berlin. Filming with his Soviet wind-up camera, he created a fascinating record, [digitised half a century later](#). Travelling was to be one of his many passions. In 1970 Chris went on [a journey to the GDR](#) and he would set off to explore the world time and again, producing more fascinating footage, including a few frames of Hoxha's pillboxes under construction. Captured during [a trip to Albania in 1980](#), this is the earliest travel film to also feature Richard, with whom Chris had recently begun a relationship. In 1985 Chris' fondness for spy novels would be tested [when overzealous Italian Carabinieri identified Richard as an Ex-CIA agent who had done weapons deals with Gaddafi](#). This led to their arrest, visits from

US military personnel and a number of newspaper articles, with a British tabloid running an article under the headline 'What a pizza cheek!', reporting how Chris and Richard had been mistaken for terrorists.



After graduating, Chris spent a year at the Co-operative College at Stanford Hall near Loughborough, before moving to work for the Nottingham Co-op from 1970. A devoted supporter of the Co-Operative movement from his early years, Chris was an active member of the Co-op Party. The movement was also a focus of much of his research, and subject of his 2007 pamphlet *The Co-operative Movement in Greater Nottingham....* Chris would later also work in other roles, including for the County Council.

The 1970s appear to have been a time of personal liberation. By the end of the decade Chris was an active part in the gay liberation movement, including work in groups like Nottingham CHE (Campaign for Homosexuality Equality). He filmed [the 1979 Gay Pride march in London](#), back then still an explicitly political event, evident not least in Chris' shots of endless columns of police being bussed in. Having long overcome the apparent isolation of his early teenage years, by now Chris had built up a wide network of friends.

His lifelong commitment to Socialism and LGBTQ+ liberation resulted in active participation in countless campaigns and events. Organising and direct action would always be crucial parts of his everyday life. When he was well into his sixties he was spotted tussling with local police as they cleared roads for a fascist march. But Chris could not only be relied upon in the streets, he spent decades relentlessly engaged in the grinding, unglamorous tedium which characterises so much of the work needed to leave the world a better place. His resilience even went so far as to endure many years of very active engagement in the Labour Party, and he was pivotal in building and amplifying queer structures within the British Labour Movement.



Although his outwardly reserved demeanour might have fooled casual acquaintances, Chris had a joyous taste for whimsical fun, nonsense and creativity. Such traits manifested in many ways, but very memorable are Chris' repeated appearances as Thatcher, [sweating under a genuinely terrifying paper mache mask whilst rocking an elegant dark blue ensemble](#), often waving scathingly disapproving placards at onlookers. Unforgotten is also his appearance as his Eminence the Blessed Cardinal Christopher Ratsarse Flashern during a papal visit in 2010.

During the 1980s and 1990s Chris played a crucial part in groups such as the Naff Co-operative, producing regular [queer news publications in Nottingham and the wider region](#). Following the early days of *Chimera*, papers like *GEM*, *Gay Nottingham* and subsequently *Outright* remained highly regular publications for almost two decades, and are now an amazing resource documenting the history of our city.

Chris also had a keen interest in the history of struggles past, undertaking extensive research and being involved in a number of groups and projects, including [People's Histreh](#) and the [Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society](#).

In Chris' most extensive publication, his lauded and successful book *A City of Light...*, he tells previously forgotten stories of many persons' struggles in the early and mid-nineteenth century, reviving the memory of the deeds of incredible people like Susannah Wright. Chris' meticulous work, his talks, publications and guided walks on Chartism, Co-Operation, Socialism and many other subjects have not only deeply enriched our understanding of local radical history, but also found recognition far beyond Nottingham.



In early 2019 Chris found out that a cancer had spread. He remained determined to live his life to the fullest, although he soon had to cope with increasing levels of disability and worsening pain and discomfort. He was able to spend his last few weeks at home. To make that possible, Chris and Richard were crucially supported by close friends, especially Ange Taggart, whose selfless love and incredibly hard work was invaluable in Chris being able to live out those final days at home.

2020 has been brutal. Countless lives around the globe have been turned upside down and so many good people have been lost. Chris' death was not unexpected, but it made a very dark year ever more devastating.



But beyond the sorrow of losing him, we will treasure all the times spent with Chris. And we will remember how he engaged in practical solidarity all his life, how much love and support he gave to others as he was striving for universal economic and social liberation.

It will be on us and those who come after us to continue his struggles, not only to defend any gains made in his day and by previous generations, but to go on the offensive.

Chris lived a life that led others to be ready and willing to give everything for him till the very end.

If that is not a sign of a life well lived, we do not know what is.

It will always be an honour to call him friend and comrade.

It is obvious that Chris' life and legacy will not be forgotten anytime soon. Not only do so many people cherish vivid memories of him, he also left a rich trove of published and unpublished records. He is exactly the kind of person future students of history will stumble upon long after we have all gone too, just as he rediscovered so many amazing people and captured echoes of their lives and struggles. We will work to make those future historians' work easier, and hope you can help them too.

If you want to share any documents, photographs, audio and/or visual records and not least your personal stories of Chris, please contact: info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk

A CITY OF LIGHT

Socialism, Chartism and Co-operation – Nottingham 1844

By Christopher Richardson

Loaf On A Stick Press

Originally published 2013, 2nd edition 2015

Though reprinted thrice already, *A City of Light* is currently unavailable, but we will produce another run soon and also make a free digital version available. Please see [the People's Histreh website](#) for updates.