

Wotcha! That single greeting, uttered either on the phone or upon meeting up, triggered thousands of conversations, discussions and debates, none of which were ever boring or without a hint of controversy.

To say we're all devastated by Richard's passing is an understatement. A huge hole has been punched in our lives, one that will be hard if not impossible to fill. We can only imagine how Susan, Emmy, Bea, Will, Florence and young Gilbert must have been feeling over the past few weeks. All our thoughts and sympathies are with you, and always will be.

But the essence of today's gathering is to celebrate our happy memories of a remarkable and extremely likeable human being.

Born just after the war, the son of a famous but anonymous politician – could it have been Winston Churchill, I've often wondered – Richard was adopted by a well-connected Kent family who eventually sent him to board in Sandwich where he excelled at cricket, rugby and hockey, and narrowly escaped a spanking from E.W. Swanton.

Following a stellar career at Nottingham University, which included hitting a boundary off Gary Sobers before losing his middle stump next ball, Richard pitched up in the world of advertising after a brief dalliance with the West Midlands nuts and bolts agglomerate GKN.

Strangely, for a lad who loved spinning a yarn, with embellishments aplenty, Richard didn't take to advertising. His next move was to become a hack. Not just any hack, ultimately The Hack.

An article in this September's edition of The Cricketer by Huw Turberville (who we met at Scarborough last year) outlines how Richard crossed the floor from advertising into journalism. The year was 1972, Australia were the opposition and England were being blown away by an eccentric swing bowler called Bob Massie. Richard, already a postgraduate in bowling skills thanks to his time opening the Bromley attack with Chunky and the late Chris Blair, spotted that Massie's action differed when he produced an inswinger as distinct to his stock outswing delivery,

Robin Marler of the Sunday Times, one of Richard's lifelong betes noir, wasn't interested in his theory so the story ended up with the Daily Mail and its eminent reporter Brian Scovell. However, the England batsmen were interested, very much, with the singular exception of John Edrich who claimed he read all deliveries off the pitch. As Massie, a swing bowler, operated mainly in the air, work that one out! The outcome, though, was that a sub-standard England team recovered to draw the series 2-2 and retain the Ashes while Massie never troubled any Test batsmen again.

A brief spell at the Gleaner in Kingston, Jamaica was the next step for the young Hack prior to becoming sports editor of the Hampstead & Highgate Express, the Ham & High, where his duties, apart from making coffee every morning for Nigel Reynolds, involved interviewing on a weekly basis the double-winning Arsenal manager Bertie Mee and Mike Brearley, both of whom exasperated him enormously. At the time I was working on a rival publication, the more down-market Hendon Times, but, oddly, I never met Richard during those years. Clearly he was moving in more exalted circles. I'm sure he still does!

Honest fellow that Richard was back then - because he didn't have an accountant – he submitted some genuine expenses for his activities after his first week at the Ham & High. They amounted to

70p, apparently – 5p for a biro, 12p for a bus ride, 15p for a sandwich, etc, etc. The outcome was the biggest bollocking of his life from the editor. “Your expenses can’t be less than £10 a week,” he was told, “otherwise we’re all going to be found out.” Richard never made that mistake again.

His next job, which is where I enter the plot, was at a long deceased company called Extel. September 1st, 1979 was the day when we started work on an experimental sports editorial service on BT’s newly launched Prestel platform. The technology was known as viewdata and, looking back, it was a test bed for what 15 years later became the internet.

After four months, unconvinced by Prestel, I switched to Extel’s main sports reporting department but Richard persevered for a few more years before the higher-ups decided the project had no future.

However, shutting the operation down arbitrarily wasn’t that easy. Extel had two ferry company clients that needed looking after post closure. Richard, an entrepreneur to his finger tips even then, put his hand up and took this business as part of his redundancy package. Two highly successful companies grew from this arrangement – Gwynn-Williams Viewdata and GB Net .

I wished Richard well on his departure and thought no more of him. Until 15 years later... dot, dot, dot... I attended a function at the Institute of Physics, as one does. Our eyes met across a room crowded with nerds, so we immediately recognised each other.

I was in business at the time with Jeff Fletcher, another of the Extel September 1st alumni, and we moved shortly afterwards into some spare space in Richard’s office just off The Strand. Indeed I remember on the first day we were there being made a very nice cup of coffee by Bea who I think was skiving off school at the time.

The Pandora’s Box our reunion opened was unbelievable. Long lunches and hours of reminiscence and argument occurred on a regular, almost daily basis. Our arenas were either the Princess Louise in Holborn or the Grand Marque in Blackfriars where Richard would traditionally hold court and settle the bill at close of play by credit card having gathered wads of cash from the rest of us. By then he did have an accountant.

Along with that came the friendship of a coterie of beguiling folk all with nicknames that could have flown off the pages of a Damon Runyan novel - Chunky, Doc, Swampy, Tommo, Del, Spud, Rhino. Even Woolfries sounded exotic at the time.

By then, Richard had been inducted into the Internet Hall of Fame. He had done well and his businesses attracted the attention of predators. Towards the end of his career he succumbed to a couple of offers before calling it a day.

After he retired, Richard, Nigel and I spent many days together at The Oval, often dazzled by an Olly Pope century, and a few at Lord’s, usually when it was raining. The Oval visits were masterpieces of quasi-military planning on Richard’s behalf because I only ever had his previous season’s Surrey membership card, always out of date. He would meet me at the entrance and steer me from there into the pavilion without anyone ever questioning my credentials.

The true stamp of Richard's immense worth, apart from the phenomenal loyalty, kindness, fellowship and love he displayed to all of us, his family and friends, was his ability to tell the same story over and over again and for it never to be boring.

I'm a wizened old hack – yes, he wasn't the only one – but I could never get enough of Les Seldon's exceptional eyesight, being able to tell which way the ball was spinning in the air; how Simon Woolfries upon dismissal would pull off his gloves and tuck his bat under his arm in one fluent flourish; how London should leave the UK to stay in the EU after the Brexit referendum; how the Government should take over all the auditing duties of the big four; how de la Pena was seriously dangerous on a bouncy pitch at Hurlingham; how life insurance was pointless once you'd paid off your mortgage; the irrelevance of countless things, from county cricket to ties.

There were dozens more opinions. He trotted them out again and again, but there was always a subtle variation and I never tired of listening. Often I would chorus the punchline with him, knowing it word for word, but who cares.

Right to the end Richard lived life to the full. He was still hitting the golf ball miles when I last played with him despite being confined to a buggy. He still loved an argument with an official, any official, whether it was a traffic warden, a barman serving short measure or a petty provincial in a golf club car park. But at the same time he could charm the birds out of the trees.

Our last Buccaneers golf trip in March was an absolute classic. One of our ports of call was Southerndown, a posh club in south Wales if you can imagine such a thing. It was the end of our tour, Richard was dispensing the prizes and we were sitting in the main bar. After that, he decided his feet were uncomfortable, so he took off his shoes and socks.

The club captain, who happened to be sitting at the next table with his cronies, demurred. An energetic exchange of words ensued, not least prompted by the captain's priggish mates who pressured him into going all Colonel Blimp. It's true, Richard was totally out of order and I told him so. Yet after a short interlude the captain ended up joining our table for a drink and a jovial chat before we decamped to London. Somehow Richard had talked him round. He was a diplomat when he wanted to be, as well as an antagonist.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have lost a monumental companion. He was the older brother I never had and the truest friend any of us will ever have. Wherever he is now, they'd better ... Wotcha!