

Fiona Flint – A few facts first

She was born as Fiona Taylor in London in 1955.

The family moved to Wroxton aged when Fiona was around 6, joining Granny, who already lived in the village at Mullions and, apart from a couple of years in Barford St Michael, Fiona lived in the village for the whole of her life.

She was the oldest of 5 children who lived in the Old Bake House.

She attended the village primary school (studied The Song of Hiawatha – Village schools were a bit different in the 1960's – I am not sure why I remember that, maybe because I had no idea what it was about when they tried it on me). She then moved on to the Broughton School in Banbury followed by Technical College and went on to have a long career in Banking.

She married Michael in 1980 – a very happy marriage for them both, cut short by the passing of Michael in 2003.

Enough Facts.

Fiona was a strong minded highly principled person. Very clear ideas on what is right and what is wrong and not afraid to share those views – This did cause a few confrontations at times. Mixed with this was incredible kindness and willingness to help others – a strange mix.

She was great at giving advice on a wide range of topics but it took a lot for her to accept any advice from others. But she also had an in-built confidence and resilience that meant even if a decision was not the best, and I can think of a few - the wood pellet boiler against everyone's advice, springs to mind - she just got on with the next thing and did not stress about it.

In 1983 Fiona and Michael bought two empty barns at the bottom of the garden of the Old Bake House. Through years of hard work, they transformed the barns into beautiful homes. They were a great team – Michael a hardworking professional builder and Fiona the Supply Manager and Labourer – she was constantly back and forwards to the Builder's Merchants and Suppliers – I am sure driving a hard bargain in the process. But she also had no problem with being a site labourer, sanding, grouting, painting, mixing – a big contrast from the glamorous professional who worked in banking.

Fiona and Michael loved and doted on their exotic Siamese cats; where our mother would buy whole fish and cut off the heads and tails for the cats, Fiona would cut off the heads and tails and feed the fillet to the cats – nothing but the best for them. This love of cats continued after Michaels passing.

When Michael passed it was a hard time for Fiona – they had been very close and she had nursed him through his illness. For solace she turned to her great friend and Sister In-Law Tina and re-ignited a love of horses. Tina had horses and they would often ride together. Of course, Fiona decided that she would like to have her own horse, after all, she had only been allowed a donkey as a child. Rather than a nice easy pony she selected a large English Cob; a very hairy mare called Bracken. This shabby steed was much loved by Fiona, particularly for her natural beauty even when she was covered in mud – which was often! This was much to Tina's despair who would have liked to see Bracken neatly clipped and trimmed to match her own horse.

Having her own horse was a great decision; something for Fiona to focus on and she had many enjoyable times with her – and many falls from her from what I hear. When the time came to give up Bracken, she donated her to a charity for disabled riding.

Fiona was very good at her banking Job, rising to Assistant Bank Manager and Small Business Adviser, she helped many businesses to get started, to grow and to weather hard times. BUT those high principles that I mentioned, did eventually come to bare: When banking policy changed, loans that she had advised on were now being called-in and people risked losing their houses as a result. Fiona actively worked against bank policy, advising long standing customers on how to keep their homes. As you can imagine this made her rather unpopular with her managers but she refused to bend. Doing the right thing was more important than her own career prospects.

Eventually she decided that her morals could not allow her to continue and she quit banking in 2009.

She went on to work in a completely different environment, providing care to people who live at home with a Call Out facility – she was often called out in the middle of the night to find all sorts of situations. It was a tough job but she loved doing it and helping people – obviously time wasters at 2.00am did get educated.

After leaving the Bank Fiona decided to get a dog, why not? She is already an expert in Cats and Horses, how hard can a small dog be?

So, Rollo arrived and ran rings around Fiona for many years. She treated him like a cat, so he behaved like a cat, jumped on the table at dinner time, climbed all over the furniture, disappeared in the village for hours – many people would ring or call round saying that they had Rolo – Fiona took it in her stride and did not stress about it – “He knows where he lives so will come back” – just like a cat.

She loved that dog, so much so that after a few years she got another dog, Lucy. Rolo only sulked for a year at having to share all the attention – but he was still top dog in Fiona’s eyes. That love also meant that she was banned from all the local vets for voicing her opinion that they had not provided the best treatment for her precious dogs.

Fiona and Michael decided not to have children of their own. But that didn’t mean there were not involved in young lives. They went on a holiday to Sri Lanka and met a young man called Charminda. They loved Sri Lanka, returning many times and they loved Charminda and the local community. They helped Charminda get started in business (help not Charity – important to them both) and he named his tourist boat “Fiona and Michal”. When Michael passed Fiona attended a religious ceremony held by the local community in Sri Lanka for Michael – they had obviously both left a mark there.

The 2004 tsunami devastated the region of Sri Lanka that Fiona and Michael had loved to visit. Fiona packed a bag a flew out to help – as you expect, she was practical, not raising a collection of jumble to then struggle to get to the right people, but taking her own cash, buying goods from local tradespeople who’s businesses had been hit and then giving the goods away to people in desperate need.

Her nieces, Rose and Alice were a big part of Fiona’s life. Rather than a favourite aunt, she acted as a second mother to them. As we all know, being a parent is more than just being a friend and Fiona was always there for them, providing the advice that she felt was needed, whether or not

they had asked for it! And when Rose had her boys, Charlie and Teddy, they too were welcomed with open arms. I know that Fiona's support was especially welcome during Colin's illness.

She was also a big part of my family, coming on multiple holidays with us and staying with us in Somerset – she loved to walk on the beaches – Wroxton being the furthest place from the sea that you can get. In 2022 we had a big family holiday in Greece with Fiona and we all had a great time – Fiona had a well-earned break from caring duties of our Mother and Colin, Snorkelling in crystal clear waters, sampling the local food and wine – the charcoal grilled lamb chops with lemon juice could never be quite matched back in the UK, despite many attempts. But she also just fitted in with the six young adults in the party, all very relaxed and fun.

Fiona has always been an active member of the village community, in recent years she enjoyed the book club, or the “Who can host the best dinner competition” as I think it has become. This was demonstrated by the memorable occasion when Fiona forgot that she was hosting and, despite armfuls of books, people had to leave as there was no magnificent spread to enjoy. I am sure there are many other village activities that Fiona enjoyed that people here will know better than me.

A few years ago, I got her a Wood Turning Lathe as a small thank you for the care that she was providing. She has always been creative but had never done any wood-working so a big gamble. She took to it immediately – all self-taught by watching YouTube videos. She has created some beautiful pieces and boosted the share prices of wood turning equipment suppliers in the process – Particularly Yandle's of Somerset. She always had her eye on the next tool.

At the end of May 2024 we were all shocked to find that Fiona had Leukaemia. She chose to fight it, knowing that it would be a hard fight and the odds of success were low. But that is Fiona, decide what you want and do what needs to be done even if it is hard.

I know that Fiona was incredibly grateful for all of the kindness and support she received from her friends in the village. At Christmas, in the true spirit of the Vicar of Dibley, she found herself in danger of receiving multiple Christmas Dinners but she decided she could only manage one and it was much appreciated. I won't try to name all that supported her as I will miss someone and that would be unfair. When we talked about it together, I said you get back what you put in – she was a good friend to many and they are just repaying the compliment.

I do want to make a special mention of Alice and Tina.

Alice was incredibly supportive to Fiona through all of her illness – regularly visiting in Wroxton, moving in, and working from there at times when Fiona needed extra help and many visits back and forth to the hospital in Oxford for provisions, changing washing etc.

When we got close to the end and visiting was very difficult, it was Tina who sat with Fiona for days to bring comfort to her in her darkest hour. And it was Tina who came to the hospital with me on the last day - a massive help to me for which I will be forever grateful.