

## **SCRIPT OF MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR (LORD) JACK ASHLEY HELD IN CHURCH HOUSE ON 2<sup>ND</sup> JULY 2012**

### **JACKIE ASHLEY – WELCOME**

Lord Speaker, Mr Speaker, my lords, ladies and gentlemen and friends – thank you all very much for coming. I'm Jackie, Jack's eldest daughter –you will be seeing my two sisters, Jane and Caroline, shortly and also here are his 9 grandchildren, his sisters, nephews and nieces and friends from far and wide.

We'd like to extend a particular welcome to those of you who have travelled a long way: from Widnes, Stoke, Devon, Scotland and Wales – and those from even further – the Conservative front benches. Your presence today is greatly appreciated.

We're here to celebrate the extraordinary life of a wonderful man – Jack Ashley, our dad. From the slums of Widnes to the House of Lords, he made a remarkable journey, overcoming poverty, a limited education, total deafness, and latterly widowhood and Parkinson's.

Most of you know of some of his achievements – few of you will know, because we didn't until recently – the enormous number of people whose lives he touched.

And throughout it all, he had a sparkle, a sense of humour and a zest for life that saw him up until a year ago, charging through the corridors of the House of Lords at such high speeds that worried officials asked if I could slow him down. "Slow him down?" I said, "You try".

We'll be looking back at his life, and at some points his grandchildren will be reading extracts from his autobiography, "Acts of Defiance". Though he was brought up a catholic, he was not religious later in life, so this is a secular service. But there will be an opportunity for reflection and prayer later on.

His creed was the Labour party creed – he was a Labour loyalist throughout his life, so it gives me great pleasure to ask Ed Miliband, the Labour leader to say a few words. Ed.

### **ED MILIBAND – JACK THE POLITICIAN**

Jackie, let me say first of all I speak for everyone gathered here today when I say we offer deep condolences to you, to Caroline and Jane, for the loss of your Dad. But we also come here to celebrate the life of an extraordinary man and I am honoured to have a chance as leader of the Labour Party to say a few words about him.

You will hear from other people who knew him very well, or had cause to be grateful for what he did in their life. What I want to say is something about Jack Ashley as a representative, and I want to say that I don't think you could imagine somebody who embodied more of the qualities you would want in someone who would be an MP, a peer, a councillor, or indeed a friend.

First of all, he had enormous courage and determination. Leaving school at 14, becoming a steel worker, getting an education at Ruskin, becoming president of the Cambridge Union, and then of course becoming a Member of Parliament. As is well-known, he showed enormous courage in overcoming his deafness, his sudden deafness, and many, many other people, I think, including many people here, would imagine themselves giving up and pursuing a different course when something like that struck them. But not Jack Ashley.

Second, although he reached enormous political heights, he never forgot where he came from. Whatever honours and distinctions he gained, he always remembered whose side he was on. He said this: "The one thing is never to accept the brush-off from any minister, Tory or Labour, if you are convinced you are right" -- and he didn't.

And that takes me to his third and most important quality that marks him out the most. He knew the greatest job was to be a voice for the voiceless, an advocate for the powerless. The rights of disabled, thalidomide victims, women abused by husbands, women who murdered their husband after abuse. The list of causes that Jack Ashley championed is a long list but none of them were fashionable causes, they were causes that were right, causes where the people who were affected did not have easy access to power. And Jack Ashley was their voice. He wrote something which sums up more eloquently than I can his approach: Justice is not time limited, it is an absolute. When a grievous wrong is done, those who have suffered need respect and help throughout their lives, not just while the rest of us can be bothered to pay attention.

There are millions of people who are living and will live better lives because Jack Ashley bothered to pay attention. His life is a reminder of the best of Labour politics and I honour his memory and spirit.

**JACKIE:**

Thank you very much, Ed. We have the current Labour leader and the former Labour leader, who was the leader for most of the time my Dad was in Parliament, so it gives me great pleasure to welcome Lord Kinnock.

**NEIL KINNOCK – KEYNOTE SPEECH**

Jack Ashley was a hero.

His heroism was most obviously manifested by his triumph over the devastating disablement of sudden and total deafness. But its *uniqueness* was proved through his unbending determination to serve, his tenacity, his vitality, his raw courage. Those qualities gave him the lifelong will to achieve liberating victories for others against personal and institutional indifference, cruelties and prejudices as old as the human race.

He was born to fight. In 1920s Widnes his beloved widowed mother was part of a huge majority forced to endure grinding toil for pitiful pay, drudgery, and deference to priests and bosses. Those conditions crushed many. They ignited Jack Ashley. At 20, in reprisal against a vindictive foreman, he established a factory union branch. At 22, after organising his neighbourhood against a slum landlord, he won a Council seat as an independent standing against Tory neglect and Labour complacency.

At 24, ten years after leaving school, he gained a trade union scholarship that took him to Ruskin College, Oxford. If that was a galactic leap from Widnes, gaining a place at Cambridge University at 26 and being elected President of the Union at 28 was an odyssey that needs a Homer to do it justice – not least because it enabled Jack to meet the heroine of his life – the lovely mathematics student and hockey blue, Pauline.

No celebration of the life of Jack Ashley would be complete without an equal tribute to this extraordinary woman, wife, mother, researcher, archivist, political and spiritual collaborator. Her high intelligence, calm logic, patience, practicality, sagacity, bravery and – above all – unconditional love gave Jack inspiration and reassurance even in the bleakest days and nights.

She was never a subordinate spouse giving doting support. Before and throughout the decades of deafness, Pauline was a cherished sanctuary and a stimulant - irreplaceably aided and abetted, of course, by Jackie, Jane and Caroline and the broadening Ashley clan.

Together, Jack and Pauline exuded partnership, unblushing affection, merriment and (a favourite word of Jack's) exuberance.

Jack would have needed that sort of comradeship even if he'd never had a disability ... He had an innate, permanent capacity to crash into authority. The title of his autobiography "*Acts of Defiance*" summarises Ashleyism. His challenges were levelled first at factory charge-hands and then against unheeding Ministers of both Parties, hidebound judges and generals, irresponsible multinationals and nationalised Boards, bigots and bullies small and big, petty and gigantic. And the bone marrow reason for all his collisions was the way, as he put it, "that ordinary people are hurt by the misuse of power".

Nowhere was – or is – the abuse of authority more tyrannising in its effect than when its victims are people with physical or mental disabilities.

Jack recognised and articulated that reality even before deafness and the "shrieking and roaring cacophony" of tinnitus hammered him into near despondency and withdrawal.

When Alf Morris won the chance to introduce his historic Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Bill in 1969, Jack seized the unequalled opportunity to illuminate the visibility of disability.

The campaign on that Bill pulled Jack out of the isolation – the “exile” – of deafness and into frantic parliamentary and public engagement. “The failure to tackle disability is a failure of democracy”, he said. No one has ever done more to rectify that chronic weakness. Jack Ashley became a projectile aimed against the causes, effects, privations and deprivations of disabilities. Sometimes with rage, often with guile, always with fact, he relentlessly used Parliament for its best purpose – combating and defeating injustice.

Some of his battles were lost. Some were drawn. Many brought advances or victories. Several are still unfinished. But the roll is incomparable. It naturally includes the multiple initiatives to change understanding of, and provision for, people with disabilities and their affected families and it encompasses the causes, particularly the preventable causes, of disabilities. Beyond those efforts, his struggles for reform and redress extended to women victims of rape and other acts of violence, reform of the legal profession, severing of energy supplies to poor people, ending Crown Immunity for public institutions, exposing and combating bullying in the forces and criminal incompetence in the Home Office forensic science service. His readiness to challenge and penalise the mighty and the malicious was unending. The names Thalidomide, Debendox and Opren and his campaigns against their manufacturers read like the tally of battle honours on a regimental banner.

Jack Ashley’s mission was to stop affliction being made into oppression. He waged his great fights because he was imbued with a love of humanity and a hatred of inhumanity. To him, complaint and protest - no matter how vivid - was never enough. ACTION to rectify, to compensate, to prevent, to bring retribution against those who caused suffering was the only meaningful, the only feasible, course.

Some of Jack’s efforts, buttressed and carried forward by inspired people and organisations, resulted in legal change, some altered official rules and conventions. Above all, cumulatively, they helped -and are helping - to shift ingrained attitudes of submission, of dismissal, of ignorance, of contempt. They gave – and give – impetus and authority to the decent instincts of mercy and generosity by making them the basis for law, for provision, and – crucially – for rights of citizenship.

Jack Ashley would vehemently insist that none of that could have been done – or ever will be done – by an individual. And, of course, he was right.

But by his boldness, his doggedness, his use of applied democracy he did turn despair into hope and hope into reality for many. He did expand liberty and dignity. He did establish foundations to be built upon here and emulated across the World.

Because of all that he was one of history's great Civil Rights leaders and among the finest parliamentarians of any age.

They are the reasons for celebrating his life and work and for remembering and rewarding him in the only way he would accept – by continuing to uphold his cause of true justice and full liberty *for all*.

## **JACKIE ASHLEY - EARLY YEARS**

Thank you Neil, and Ed, for those wonderful words about Dad.

Neil described how the social conditions of the 1920s ignited the young Jack Ashley.

The poverty was very real indeed. His mother, Bella, who brought up Jack and his three sisters, had to rely on cleaning jobs in the early mornings and overnight. Their tiny two up, two down, which was shared with another family, had no bathroom and an outside toilet. There was no electricity, and the gaslight depended on a meter which ate pennies at a voracious rate. When there were no pennies left, which often happened, the family relied on candlelight. In his book, Jack describes his first encounter with electricity.

**MARK ASHLEY** *I went one day to meet Mam at the ICI offices, but as she hadn't finished the scrubbing and no office staff were around, I wandered around the huge block. It was then I first discovered electric lights could be magically flicked on and off with a switch. I had to be dragged away from the switches.*

He left school at 14 to become a laborer so that he could start earning to help support the family.

At Bolton's copper factory he loaded copper bars into a furnace - and developed arm muscles that were to stand him in good stead all his life. And it was here that that vindictive foreman, referred to by Neil, helped him realise how to build *political* muscle through getting people to band together. In his autobiography, Dad described one of his early run-ins with this man, who sold the tickets for the factory meals.

**ISABEL MARR** *Whenever I appeared he became engrossed in his work, leaving me to stand waiting a long time for my ticket. One day, when he played his usual trick, I paid with a pile of coppers – 84 halfpennies. He refused to accept them but I insisted he must as they were British currency. Reluctantly he counted the coins and said there were only 83. I maintained there were 84. There was a silent and angry recount until, just before he reached the 83<sup>rd</sup>, I tossed the additional halfpenny casually onto his desk, indicating that I too could play games.*

A few years later he displayed that same determination to fight back against bullies when he took on his slum landlord. Dad had discovered that under the Rent Act he could get his house, with its leaking roof and huge holes in the walls declared unfit for human habitation. He got an application form from the council which enabled him to have the rent cut by 40%. In response, the landlord, who had always refused to do repairs, insulted Dad's beloved mother, Bella. Dad was infuriated, but the landlord assumed he could do nothing more. How wrong he was.

**MARK ASHLEY** *As I couldn't damage his pride, I decided to damage his pocket. ... I got hundreds of forms from the Town Hall and delivered them to every house in and around Wellington Street.*

Jack became a local hero. He was propelled onto the Widnes town council, where he was keen to continue his campaign to tackle slum housing. But his approach was rather different to that of his fellow councillors.

**ISABEL MARR** *"When I took my seat on the council I found myself in a cosy sedate atmosphere which discouraged political debate.... Proceedings were formal, courteous and even pleasant; I looked forward to tossing a few stones into this tranquil political pond.*

He always had a confidence and directness that was so effective politically and personally. He never felt the need to be bland or to cover up what he didn't know and was proud of his working class roots. When he was applying for his trade union scholarship to Ruskin College Oxford, the tutors quizzed him in the traditional fashion of an Oxford interview. He replied bluntly:

**ISABEL MARR** *It's no good asking me about what I've read. I left school at 14 and have only read 2 books since – that's why I want to come and study here.*

And he certainly didn't feel intimidated by the more extensive education and very different background of most of his contemporaries at Cambridge. Or if he did, he didn't show it. As the first working class president of that exclusive debating club – the Cambridge Union – he refused to wear the black tie outfit that was expected. It was a union after all, so he had to be bolshie. But the union gave him a taste for debating that was to lead to Westminster.

## **JANE ASHLEY- INTO PARLIAMENT**

But first to the BBC - where he worked as a current affairs producer in both radio and television for 15 years. He worked on a range of programmes ranging from talks for the General Overseas Service to Panorama.

The buttoned up formality and deferential attitude of the BBC in the early 1950s didn't wholly suit Jack's style. He always enjoyed larking about – you can see him up on the screen doing impressions of someone they had interviewed.

On one occasion he approved a breezy script by a Canadian woman about “Queen Liz”. His bosses were aghast. He was hastily overruled.

He eventually he found his way back to politics. He was delighted to be selected to fight the safe seat of Stoke on Trent South for Labour at the 1966 general election. It was working class constituency of coal mines, steelworks and the potteries. He felt immediately at home there. And with the backing of his constituency, and his union the GMB, he was on the threshold of the Parliamentary career he had always wanted.

In Parliament he stood out. He was seen as a very high flyer.

### **JANE ASHLEY - HOPES DASHED**

But then the event which was to change his life. At the end of 1967, an apparently minor ear operation went drastically wrong, and a virulent infection left him with no hearing at all. He spoke of the chill and bleakness as the implications became clear. He suddenly couldn't understand anything anyone said. Everything had to be laboriously written down.

And when Pauline broke her wrist shortly after Jack's operation, they had glimpse of the how deafness was regarded:

***TOM ASHLEY*** *The nurses seemed more concerned about Pauline's injury than my deafness. One disability was visible, the other was not, and this affected their attitude. It was a foretaste of the future when some people were to treat me with near condescension if I failed to understand what they said.*

He recalled how even the consultants dealing with deafness reflected this:

***EMILY MARR*** *'How old is he?' one enquired. He spoke without moving his lips like a ventriloquist. 'Why don't you ask him?' Pauline replied. 'And try speaking a little more clearly' "*

The worst of it all was that Jack didn't just lose his hearing, he also developed tinnitus – screeching and roaring noises inside his head which came to dominated his life for 25 years. He said it was an affliction as disturbing as total deafness, and if, he were offered a magic wand which could overnight cure just one, he was not sure which he would choose.

Although Jack set about learning lip- reading with the same zeal he put into everything else, so many sounds look the same, so many words are invisible. He later observed that while most languages could be mastered with sufficient effort, with lip-reading much of the language is not available to be learned.

To continue in parliament seemed impossible. He told his local paper, the Stoke Sentinel, and his party, that he was resigning.

But there was an avalanche of support from his constituency party and from parliamentary colleagues. The Sentinel ran headlines saying “*Jack must stay.*”

He decided to try.

There followed the hardest few years of his life. He said he felt “unbearably isolated” in Parliament in those early days. He would often eat alone in the cafeteria. He described how relationships with colleagues changed:

**TOM ASHLEY** *The middle distance acquired a new fascination for some as they passed. Others would become aware of a sense of time, even urgency for appointments. People who were formerly friendly passed by frowning as if preoccupied with solemn innermost thoughts*

And there were enormous challenges when he first went back into the chamber:

**EMILY MARR** *After a few moments I tried to lip-read. I had not expected to understand much, but the reality was chilling. I understood practically nothing. ... The chamber was transformed into a mysterious menacing arena.*

But he gradually found ways to adapt and the House embraced him. MPs, including Prime Ministers from Harold Wilson to Margaret Thatcher, turned to speak clearly when they could.

As Neil pointed out, his work on the Chronically Sick and Disabled person's bill in 1969 started to bring out the old campaigner in him. And then came thalidomide – the drug taken in pregnancy which caused severe disabilities.

Rosaleen Moriarty Simmonds, a thalidomide survivor, is going to take up the story of the battle for compensation. While she makes her way up to the stage, we are going to hear the words that Jack used in the Commons in 1972 to describe the youngsters' plight: They were words very much of that time, but they were carried on all the bulletins and most of the front pages the next day.

**TOM ASHLEY** *“Adolescence is a time for living and laughing, for learning and loving. But what kind of adolescence will a ten year old boy look forward to when he has no arms, no legs, one eye, no pelvic girdle, and is only two feet tall? That is the height of two whisky bottles placed one on top of the other. How can an eleven year old girl look forward to laughing and loving when she has no hand to be held and no legs to dance on.”*

## **ROSALEEN MORIARTY-SIMMONDS - THALIDOMIDE**

My parents were only 18 and 21 when I was born, and I can only imagine the stress they endured during their fight for justice in the 1960's. They were amongst the first set of parents who fought Distillers, the company who manufactured the drug. There had been little publicity for our cause for over a decade, because, although the initial cases were settled in 1968, there were hundreds more still pending, and Distillers was able to hide in the shadows of legal wrangling.



I was just 11 when Jack and Sir Harold Evans, editor of the Sunday Times, bravely took on Distillers together. In September 1972 the Sunday Times published its front page lead, headed “*Our Thalidomide Children – A Cause for National Shame.*” But yet again, Distillers cried foul and a legal gag followed, which silenced the media once more.

Jack Ashley broke through the legal manoeuvring, by using parliamentary privilege to argue our case in the House of Commons. He got round the rules of *sub judice*, by arguing it was a moral rather than a legal issue. He had some persuading to do, to get that one past the authorities!

In November 1972, he addressed the Commons with a speech that resulted in his life being turned into a whirlwind of correspondence and interviews – raising the profile of the Thalidomide story to heights that our parents could only have dreamed of, and which generated headlines around the world.

The help which Jack Ashley gave to Thalidomide children cannot be overstated. Very few of us had the pleasure of meeting him, but we will be forever indebted to him, for his commitment in righting one of the most unjustifiable wrongs, in British legal history.

Long after we “children” ceased to make news headlines, Jack maintained his interest in our lives.

I recall meeting him at the House of Lords while making a BBC Radio Wales documentary about Thalidomide. I, my husband Stephen, and my producer waited just inside the St. Stephen’s entrance, and Jack appeared on his legendary scooter, Parliamentary papers stacked neatly in the scooter basket.

We had a meeting room booked across the road at Millbank, so we headed to the nearest pedestrian crossing. What a sight we must have been as the traffic stopped, and we streamed across – a peer of the realm zooming along in front on his scooter, closely followed by two wheelchair users, and a Radio Producer. I have an illustration in my office, which a friend of mine prepared, recreating what can only be described as my own, Abbey Road moment.



In his autobiography, Jack talked candidly about what a profound effect the Thalidomide campaign had upon him. It helped him prove that disability was no disqualification to being a respected Parliamentarian, and a forthright campaigner. In May of this year, an International gathering took place not far from where we are today, to look back at Thalidomide 50 years on. We paid tribute to Jack for the role he played over the years. Many of the children (now adults) – of whom he had spoken so eloquently some 40 years before – were there. Even though (in his words) we had no hands to hold or legs to dance on, we were living proof that laughing and loving is possible, even with devastating and severe impairments.

Jack will be remembered with great affection for his tireless work for Thalidomide-impaired people and their families; as a fierce and effective champion of disability and human rights; and as a supporter of our aim to establish a lasting memorial to the Thalidomide story.

But above all, to us, Jack Ashley – Lord Jack Ashley - always was, and always will be **“A Man for all People”**.

## **CAROLINE ASHLEY - JACK THE CAMPAIGNER**

Thank you Rosie.

As Rosie says, legal manoeuvring got him around sub judice. But sometimes it needed an Ashley-kind of bloody mindedness too.

After speaking in Parliament about Distillers, he turned up at Television Centre to do an interview. Only to be told by the producer that the BBC lawyers had vetoed it - as BBC lawyers do!

Instead of heading home, Jack responded by demanding to see the lawyers. They had a discussion he later described as “vigorous and lively”. The interview went ahead.

From then on, it was clear – to Jack, Pauline, Parliament and public - that deafness was no bar to Jack being a highly effective campaigner. He was soon receiving letters from everyone who felt the need for a champion. He would recount the latest grievous injustice at the kitchen table. Some writers are here today. Such was the volume of letters that our home was given its own postcode.

Mum and Dad worked out so many ways to get around deafness. The most ingenious was this telephone, made at Mum’s request.

An extra earpiece on the phone allowed Pauline - or a secretary or daughter - to listen in and repeat the question silently for dad to lip-read and reply. This is how people heard those distinctive tones on umpteen radio interviews. It worked so well, he was sometimes ‘accused’ of not really being deaf.

Of course in the chamber he had no helper. So the next ingenious and invaluable invention, several years later, was palantype – mechanical shorthand, turning verbatim speech into phonetic English on screen.

It took a few years and some struggles to develop. Initially it came out on a paper roll, not far off ticker tape and was truly phonetic. I remember sitting in Dad’s study, he thrilled and me baffled, as we tried to decode this wonderful new invention. Look up at the screen and you will see the Palantype text on the first day it was used in Parliament, after 6 years of life as a deaf MP (February 1975)



This says:

**AMY ROSENBAUM** *This equipment will first be used in the House of Commons this afternoon, Feb 1, by Mr Jack Ashley MP*

We might think it challenging to follow that, whizzing past at the speed of speech. But for Jack, being able to follow proceedings in the Commons, momentous:

**AMY ROSENBAUM** *It was a turning point in my life.*

In Parliament, It helped him to become an even sharper thorn in the side of ministers. And being a Labour minister certainly didn't mean you got let off lightly.

Indeed, Labour to the core, he had a cross-party spirit too.

He mobilized MPs on disability issues though the All Party Parliamentary Group Disability Group which he founded in 1968 and chaired for 40 years. As Chair, he worked closely with RADAR – now Disability Rights UK – which provided research and support for the group, with a succession of talented staff. Agnes Fletcher was one of them.

### **AGNES FLETCHER – THAT BLOODY JACK ASHLEY**

Jack was a campaigner from childhood. From his heart. From his head. And to his fingertips.

The very model of a parliamentary and family man, he was also a model campaigner, combining passion, persistence and persuasion with strong partnerships – within and across the party line and outside Westminster.

Jack's successes - on domestic violence, rape, poorly tested drugs and contaminated blood, subtitling and many other causes – provide a campaign primer.

He was affectionately known by allies and foes as “that bloody Jack Ashley” for the passion he brought to tackling injustice.

His 45 years in Parliament were a time of immense change for deaf and disabled people and their families. Benefits. Anti-discrimination legislation. Support for family carers. Choice and control over services. Jack was instrumental to so many of them.

Patience is overrated as a virtue. I'm not sure Jack had much of it. But as well as passion, he had persistence. He knew most campaigns take many years.

Into his 80s and in poor health, Jack persisted. Asking questions, intervening in debates, sponsoring private member's bills on independent living. In his final Lords' contribution last year, he summed up the moment, so frequent in his campaigns, when those with the power to change things offer emollient words instead.

“One of the problems about disability”, he said, “is that some people tend to speak in dulcet, sentimental terms about the subject. They say: ‘We support the principle of your Bill but regret we can't support the Bill itself.’”

Jack rejected sentimentality. He wanted actions not words. He never stood for ministerial bluster or brush-off.

As well as being passionate and persistent, Jack was a persuasive performer. His arguments were well-researched and tested. I remember Jack and Pauline quizzing

me over amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill of 1998 and feeling as though I was being mauled by two kindly but tenacious terriers.

Jack's was never highfalutin' in his language but his rhetoric was always finely crafted and powerful. For someone whose hearing was absent or impaired for most of his parliamentary career, he was a consummate communicator. As he put it, "Looking the world straight in the eye, while simultaneously reading its lips, requires the skill of an acrobat and the persistence of a leech."

He could be lacerating in his righteous indignation but there was no malice. His armoury, or rather his disarmery, was founded on reason, courtesy and wit.

All of us researchers and parliamentary officers who worked closely with him, despite the ridiculous hours and the wretched pay, came unashamedly to adore him, as Victoria Scott, who named her son after Jack, puts it.

Gossip over toasted teacakes in the Lords, Jack's crinkly, twinkling blue eyes, and, like the Cheshire cat, that wonderful smile are what remain with me.

Partnerships with the media and pressure groups outside Parliament were as important and effective as those with colleagues from across the parties. And long before the concept of 'coproduction' of policy, Jack was inviting disabled people into the corridors of power to inform the work of the All Party Group.

His greatest partnership of course was with Pauline. Jack described her extraordinary "clarity of mind and powers of concentration", acknowledging her huge contribution to his campaigns.

To those of us who worked closely with Jack, the value and strength of that 50 year partnership was clear. The respect and affection were too.

Seeing them together felt like witnessing John Donne's two souls which were one; the stiff twin compasses; the ideally matched twin hemispheres.

As Donne also said, any man's death diminishes me. But this wonderful man changed for the better the lives of many thousands of people. We owe it to Jack to defend and to build on his legacy with bloody-minded passion and persistence. That will be our tribute and our thanks.

## **CAROLINE ASHLEY**

Thank you Agnes.

One of the many signs of changing attitudes to disability was the creation of the new post, in 1974, the first ever Minister for the Disabled.

The first holder of that post was Lord Alf Morris, who worked together with Jack on many, many campaigns. Lord Morris will now read a particularly apt poem from George Eliot,

## **ALF MORRIS – “Count That Day Lost”**

Mr Speaker, my Lord Speaker, I knew Jack Ashley for 60 years or more. He was a peer, and yet peerless. The world is a poorer place for his passing. And I quote from George Eliot's verse "Count that day lost". She wrote:

If you sit down at set of sun  
And count the acts that you have done,  
And, counting, find  
One self-denying deed, one word  
That eased the heart of him who heard,  
One glance most kind  
That fell like sunshine where it went --  
Then you may count that day well spent.  
But if, through all the livelong day,  
You've cheered no heart, by yea or nay --  
If, through it all  
You've nothing done that you can trace  
That brought the sunshine to one face--  
No act most small  
That helped some soul and nothing cost --  
Then count that day as worse than lost.  
*George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)*

## **CAROLINE ASHLEY**

Thank you Alf.

Jack was much more than ‘the deaf MP’ but there is no doubt that deafness shaped the second half of his life and he in turn helped reshaped the world of deafness.

He was truly shocked by attitudes to deafness when he found himself plunged into the deaf world. As he said in '68: “*equating the deaf with the daft is not confined to music halls.*”

Attitudes still are a problem, but much has moved on. David Livermore worked closely with Jack, particularly as President of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf – now Action on Hearing Loss – and of Deafness Research UK.

## **DAVID LIVERMORE – CHAMPION OF THE DEAF**

I feel greatly honoured to pay this tribute to Jack Ashley today and I feel sure that I speak on behalf of the deaf charities and, of course, the 9 million deaf and hearing impaired people in this country. I had not met Jack until I became chairman of the RNID in 1996 when he was our president. I was invited to meet the great man in the House of Lords and he asked me for my first impressions. I replied that there seemed to be an overly large number of deaf charities. I was able to tell the staff of the RNID that Jack had “completely agreed with me”. They howled with laughter and said that, quite apart from those charities which Jack and Pauline themselves had founded, he was chairman or president of almost all the rest!

Deafness is often referred to as the hidden disability, since deaf people themselves have not been able to ‘voice’ their case and support has only come from people with direct experience of deafness. Realisation came swiftly to the Ashleys - when Jack lost his hearing after an operation, the sudden loss of communication for a career politician must have been devastating. The experience gained by Pauline and Jack in coping with this crisis in their lives gave them insight into the appalling challenges that deaf people face in everyday life and a passion which, when coupled with their tenacious campaigning skills, provided an irresistible force for change. Deaf people had indeed acquired a ‘voice’ and a very distinctive voice.

Their successes were many and across the board. In 1985 Jack and Pauline founded what now called the Deafness Research UK to raise funds for research into the causes and amelioration of deafness, for example a key development was the detection of deafness in new-born babies. In 1991 they set up Tynetalk - a text to voice relay system with BT and the RNID, which enabled deaf people for the first time to communicate by telephone. Jack’s hearing had been partially restored by one of the earliest cochlear implants, and the foremost specialist, John Graham, relates how Jack, with his usual bloody-mindedness, would immediately and successfully take up the cause of anyone needlessly denied a cochlear implant by a health authority. Unsurprisingly, with his background in the BBC, Jack enthusiastically and successfully championed the cause of subtitling on television.

Above all, Jack Ashley served as a magnificent role-model. Deaf children and their parents were taught to have low career expectations and here was a deaf person playing a major role in the political life of this country. I was told for my daughter that she would never have a reading-age of more than 8 and a very limited occupation. She actually has a degree from UCL and is a skilled conservator. Through Jack’s inspiration, this experience is mirrored by so many other deaf people and movingly illustrated by postings on Jack’s website.

Without question the lives of deaf people have been transformed over the last twenty years, and much of this progress has stemmed from the drive and determination of this remarkable team. Jack’s ability to badger ministers and civil servants was legendary. Amazingly, despite giving so many people such a hard time, afterwards they still appeared to love him. In later years, of course, he acquired the status of a

'national treasure' and no-one dared argue with him! Someone once said to me - not without feeling – that "Jack Ashley was second only to the Queen Mother in the affections of the British people". I know that Jack will hate me saying this but thank god for Jack Ashley!

## **CAROLINE ASHLEY**

In 1993 after retiring from the Commons Jack had a cochlear implant. The implant represented a massive technological breakthrough for him – a way to bypass the dead inner ear, and get some sound messages into the brain.

The speech he could hear was not what others hear – he likened it to listening to a Dalek with laryngitis. But, it transformed his lip-reading and ease of communication. It was doubly wonderful for easing the tinnitus – the clanging and ringing that had tormented him since going deaf. He rejoiced at being able to hear his first grandson speak.

The implant also meant he could he could hear music – after a fashion - and he loved the Italian tenors, like Pavarotti.

Jack had been very musical and as a boy he sang in the church choir. If his tales are true, he was not a very pious choirboy, but he had an excellent voice. We now have some time for our own reflection, accompanied by one of Jack's favourites from his early choirboy days: Ave Maria, sung by 9-year-old George Gibbon, accompanied by Nico de Villiers.

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## **GEORGE GIBBON – SINGS AVE MARIA** **Accompanied by Nico de Villiers**

## **CAROLINE ASHLEY**

Our Jack, the factory lad and shop steward, turned graduate and MP, reached the 'Other Place' when he was 'ennobled' in 1992, becoming Lord Ashley of Stoke. One



of his oldest friends, Bernard Donoughue, now Lord Donoughue of Ashton, recalls their time together.

## **BERNARD DONOUGHUE – CARRY ON CAMPAIGNING: THE HOUSE OF LORDS**

I first met Jack some 50 years ago, through a friend  
In a pub off Tottenham Court Road, before he was deaf.

Struck by how he was interested in everything political.

By his love of sport – rugby league, horse racing, snooker.  
And he was funny, with that wry humour  
About the foibles of his contemporaries – and of himself.

We immediately hit it off. Friends for life.

Bound, I suppose, by some common childhood heritage.  
Provincial industrial working class.  
Each of us lifted by education out of poverty – his tougher than mine.

Solid labour. Pragmatically loyal. No leftie posturing.  
That was Jack.

I was most struck by his commitment, his dedication,  
His determination to change things for the better.

We stayed in touch through the 'sixties.  
I enjoyed his great Thalidomide campaign in the Sunday Times

I spoke to the then editor, Harry Evans, a few days ago about Jack.  
He said: 'God he was impressive. Walked into my office  
The Tuesday after our first story, and he took it over. Drove our campaign.  
Our voice in parliament.  
We would not have succeeded without him.  
Above all I remember his dedication'.

The same dedication was there in the 1970s Labour Govt.  
Jack was only a parliamentary secretary – but  
to the iconic and influential Barbara Castle.  
He made such an impact for the disabled,  
Along with his brother – in – arms Alf Morris.

In my published diaries of the time he appears  
more than many cabinet ministers.

It was then Jack approached me about getting him  
A Palantype machine  
To help him participate in Commons business.

I worked in number ten for prime minister Harold Wilson –  
Jack's political hero.

I persuaded Harold to press our Chief Whip to do something.  
Harold told me the latter resisted, saying  
'why should Jack Ashley be so privileged?'

Privileged! Deaf Jack privileged! I exploded.

Harold was - for a politician – a kind man and saw to it  
That Jack got the machine. It transformed his Commons life.

And made him so effective in the Lords, as many here saw.

In the Lords, Jack and I had tea regularly, reminiscing.  
But he was always interested in what was going on politically, now.

The state of the party? How the leader was doing?  
(often badly). But he was always loyal.

At our last meeting - & we both knew it would be our last –  
I was again struck by how  
despite all his success, despite that crippling disease,  
He was still the same Jack.

Still completely genuine and authentic.  
With his deep values  
From the best of the old northern working class.

Still funny. Still no nonsense.  
Never a victim. Still a champion.

As his wheel chair buzzed away down the Lords corridor,  
I suddenly recalled what that awful Chief Whip  
Had said to Harold Wilson -  
And I realised that in a curious way he was right.

Jack was privileged.

He was privileged to be so talented. So brave.  
To have come so far  
And to have done so much for so many.

He was privileged to have such a beautiful wife, Pauline,  
With her mona lisa smile.  
Jack's ears and lips communicating with the outside world.

Privileged to have 3 such lovely daughters -  
- We never finished our first cup of tea without

my hearing about their achievements and perfections.

He was privileged to be such a wonderful man.

Of course, he himself made those privileges,  
Against all the odds.

And we were privileged to know him.  
And to love him.

### **CAROLINE ASHLEY**

Thank you Bernard

As Bernard says, what people remember most about Jack is not what he achieved, but what he was. Always ready with a joke, a twinkle, and compassion for others.

Right to the end this spirit was clear. In one of his last conversations during his short stay in hospital, he held the Consultant's arm and joked 'Why don't you become my GP?'

This spirit is captured in a poem. It is read by a longstanding friend of the Ashley family, who would chat over politics with Jack while speaking alongside him at our family weddings and baby welcomings: David Miliband.

### **DAVID MILIBAND – “Not, how did he die, but how did he live?”**

Thank you Caroline. I was immensely touched when Caroline, my friend for nearly 30 years, asked me to read this striking apposite and anonymous poem at this memorial service.

For all the torrent of words about Jack Ashley, the politician, Jack Ashley the campaigner, I knew Jack Ashley as a family man. I never met him actually in the House of Lords or the House of Commons, I only met him at weddings and family occasions.

And so when I thought what tribute would I think of for Jack, one thing came into my mind immediately, and that is that the greatest testament to Jack's passion, integrity, honesty, humanity, is actually that those values and qualities are lived out in the daily lives of his daughters and in their contributions to public life, not just in this country but, as I know from Caroline's work with her husband Richard abroad, all round the world.

For many of us in public life, it is easy to think we haven't got the time for the people who are closest to us. But Jack Ashley taught that actually the time you spend on your children and their children is the greatest legacy of all.

This poem is entitled “The Measure of a Man: Not, how did he die, but how did he live?”

Not, how did he die, but how did he live?  
Not, what did he gain, but what did he give?  
These are the units to measure the worth  
Of a man as a man, regardless of his birth.  
Nor what was his church, nor what was his creed?  
But had he befriended those really in need?  
Was he ever ready, with words of good cheer,  
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?  
Not what did the sketch in the newspaper say,  
But how many were sorry when he passed away?

## **GRANDCHILDREN – GRANDAD JACK**

**BEN ROSENBAUM** Thank you David. The poem asks how many were sorry. The answer is LOADS. When news of his death came out he “trended” on twitter. Over 10,000 people tweeted about grandad. He had no idea what twitter was - less still trending. But he’d have chuckled, and would have been touched and surprised by the response. In the days after he died, as well as the tweets, messages, cards and letters that poured in, there were wonderful tributes written on the website.

Here are a few which we feel sum up granddad and his impressive double act with granny:

**ALEX ASHLEY:** ‘There was everything to admire about them both, but I think above all it was that they remained absolutely genuine and unassuming, at ease with all sorts and conditions of men. They transcended all the barriers of class, opinion, money, simply by their great goodness and moral purpose. Jack and Pauline – we salute you.’

**AMY ROSENBAUM:** ‘Jack Ashley made me feel that becoming deaf didn’t mean your life stopped. He let me and others find our way to using its power & potential.’

**ALEX ASHLEY:** ‘Jack Ashley transformed lives for people who will never know his name.’

**AMY ROSENBAUM:** ‘His common sense was born of never forgetting where he came from and what could be achieved.’

**ALEX ASHLEY:** ‘He would concern himself with issues which appeared trivial to others but important to individuals.’

**AMY ROSENBAUM:** ‘The best thing about Jack was the sparkle in his eye. The world is a worse place without him but better because of him.’

**BEN ROSENBAUM** As his grandchildren, we didn't know him as Jack Ashley the politician. We knew the caring and mischievous man with that infamous sparkle; the man who would hide your plate every time you glanced away at dinner, who loved to arm wrestle, who was always teasing us.

Our young and treasured memories are of the granddad who snuck back to play a little more football after one of the three daughters, worried about him overdoing it, had told him to take a rest.

We remember the granddad that used to bend the rules just enough to make sure that a different grandchild won every time we played cards. We remember the granddad that told enthralling stories about a young, and very handsome, boy called Jack, who always triumphed over his rivals in Widnes.

Our early memories are of him as the perfect granddad. But as we grew older he became the perfect friend. He was always a joy to be around. He was witty, cheeky and a man of strong opinions. He would have made a controversial rugby league coach, as he often proudly claimed that he'd fire 'any idiot who dropped the ball'.

He played a central role in all of our lives. It would have been a huge honour to know granddad, but to have been his grandchildren, was a tremendous privilege.

## **JANE ASHLEY - CLOSE**

Jack was indeed a wonderful family man. He was always close to his sisters in Widnes and they would speak on the phone most days. And as daughters growing up we all felt utterly loved. We knew he would go to the ends of the earth for us. And indeed, when we went to the ends of the earth on various gap year travels, he would write almost every day!

He had an extraordinary sense of humour and a super-sensitivity to knowing what people were feeling. He was able to connect with almost everyone he met – somehow leaping over the normal barriers of formality and touching the person inside.

When you went for a cup of tea in the Commons canteen with him, you'd see the lady on the till light up when she saw dad coming, and they would share a little joke. These connections happened *everywhere*. In recent years when we'd be walking – so very slowly - through long hospital corridors, passers-by would overtake with a look of concern. Dad would catch their eye and challenge them to a race! Their expression would change in an instant into a smile.

Towards the end of his life he showed such amazing courage and dignity, such generosity of spirit, such irrepressibility. He had impossible optimism. His spirit was like a silver air bubble which kept rising to the surface, however many times it was pushed down in the water.

It was that spirit that enabled him to change so many lives – though changing attitudes, through changing policy and the law, and through taking up individual cases – and brought so much happiness to those around him.

We're very honoured that Mr Speaker has set up the Annual Jack Ashley Memorial Lecture on disability issues, to be held in Speaker's House. The first one will be this autumn. Thank you very much Mr Speaker - it is so important to keep up Jack's campaigning.

We hope you will enjoy the website we set up in his honour. Do leave a message if you haven't already. If you would like to make a donation to his charities, details are in programme and on the website.

We hope you will join us for a glass of wine and a sandwich next door.

And we'd like to leave you with a quote from someone on twitter which would have made Jack, the non-believer, chuckle:

**ALEX ASHLEY**

*Very sad to hear that Jack Ashley has passed away. A wonderful man & campaigner for the disabled. The stairs to heaven will have a ramp shortly.*

*END*

*For further celebration of Jack's life, to leave a tribute or donation, or view media coverage, visit [www.lordjackashley.co.uk](http://www.lordjackashley.co.uk)*