

= Graham Chapman =

Graham Arthur Chapman ( 8 January 1941 ? 4 October 1989 ) was an English comedian , writer , actor , and one of the six members of the surreal comedy group Monty Python . He played authority figures such as the Colonel and the lead role in two Python films , Holy Grail and Life of Brian .

Chapman was born in Leicester and was raised in Melton Mowbray . He enjoyed science , acting and comedy , and after graduating from Emmanuel College , Cambridge and St Bartholomew 's Medical College , he turned down a career as a doctor to be a comedian . Chapman established a writing partnership with John Cleese , which reached its critical peak with Monty Python during the 1970s . Chapman left Britain for Los Angeles in the late 1970s , where he attempted to be a success on American television , speaking on the college circuit and producing the pirate film Yellowbeard , before returning to Britain in the early 1980s .

Chapman was openly homosexual and a strong supporter of gay rights , and was in a relationship with David Sherlock for most of his adult life . He was an alcoholic during his time at Cambridge and the early Python years , quitting shortly before working on Life of Brian . Chapman died of tonsil and spinal cancer on 4 October 1989 , on the eve of Monty Python 's 20th anniversary , and his life and legacy were commemorated at a private memorial service at St Bartholomew 's with the other Pythons .

= = Early life and education = =

Graham Arthur Chapman was born on 8 January 1941 at the Stoneygate Nursing Home , Stoneygate , Leicester , the son of policeman Walter Chapman and Edith Towers . He had an elder brother , John , who was born in 1936 . One of Chapman 's earliest memories was seeing the remains of Polish airmen who had suffered an aeroplane accident near Leicester , later saying the horrific sights of this remained in his memory .

Chapman was educated at Melton Mowbray Grammar School . He showed a strong affinity for science , sports and amateur dramatics , and was singled out for attention when a local paper reviewed his performance of Mark Antony in Shakespeare 's Julius Caesar . Graham and John Chapman were both avid fans of radio comedy , being especially fond of The Goon Show and Robert Moreton 's skill of telling jokes the wrong way round and reversing punchlines . Biographer Jim Yoakum said " the radio shows didn 't necessarily make him laugh . "

In 1959 , Chapman began to study medicine at Emmanuel College , Cambridge . He joined the Cambridge Footlights , where he first began writing with John Cleese . Following graduation , Chapman joined the Footlights show " Cambridge Circus " and toured New Zealand , deferring his medical studies for a year . After the tour , he continued his studies at St Bartholomew 's Medical College , but became torn between whether to pursue a career in medicine or acting . His brother John later said , " He wasn 't ever driven to go into medicine ... it wasn 't his life 's ambition . "

= = Career = =

= = = Pre @-@ Python career = = =

Following their Footlights success , Chapman and Cleese began to write professionally for the BBC , initially for David Frost but also for Marty Feldman . Frost had recruited Cleese , and in turn Cleese decided he needed Chapman as a sounding board . Chapman also contributed sketches to the radio series I 'm Sorry , I 'll Read That Again and wrote material on his own and with Bill Oddie . He wrote for The Illustrated Weekly Hudd ( starring Roy Hudd ) , Cilla Black , This is Petula Clark , and This Is Tom Jones . Chapman , Cleese , and Tim Brooke @-@ Taylor later joined Feldman in the television comedy series At Last the 1948 Show . It was Chapman 's first significant role as a performer as well as a writer and he displayed a gift for deadpan comedy ( such as in the sketch " The Minister Who Falls to Pieces " ) and imitating various British dialects . The series was the first to

feature Chapman 's sketch of wrestling with himself .

Despite the show 's success , Chapman was still unsure about abandoning his medical career . In between the two series of At Last the 1948 Show he completed his studies at St Bartholomew 's , and became professionally registered as a doctor . Chapman and Cleese also wrote for the long @-@ running television comedy series Doctor in the House , and both appeared on a one @-@ off television special , How to Irritate People alongside Brooke @-@ Taylor and Michael Palin . One of Cleese and Chapman 's sketches , featuring a used car salesman refusing to believe a customer 's model had broken down , became the inspiration for the Dead Parrot sketch . Chapman also co @-@ wrote several episodes of Doctor in the House 's follow up , Doctor in Charge , with Bernard McKenna .

= = = Monty Python = = =

In 1969 , Chapman and Cleese joined the other Pythons including Terry Gilliam , Eric Idle , Terry Jones , and Palin for their sketch comedy show Flying Circus . The group 's writing was split into well @-@ defined teams , with Chapman collaborating almost exclusively with Cleese . Chapman was particularly keen to remove stereotypical punchlines in sketches and created The Colonel , who would stop them in mid @-@ flow by saying they were " too silly " .

Although the pair were officially equal partners , Cleese later thought that Chapman contributed comparatively little in the way of direct writing , saying " he would come in , say something marvellous and then drift off in his own mind . " The other Pythons have said that Chapman 's biggest contribution in the writing room was an intuition for what was funny . Gilliam later recalled that " Graham would do the nudge that would push it into something extraordinary . " The show was an immediate success , and Chapman was delighted to learn that medical students at St Bartholomew 's crowded round the television in the bar to watch it . Chapman was frequently late for rehearsing or recording , leading to the other Pythons calling him " the late Graham Chapman " .

Chapman 's main contribution to the Dead Parrot sketch , derived from the How to Irritate People piece and involving a customer returning a faulty toaster , was " How can we make this madder ? " He decided to replace the toaster with a dead Norwegian Blue parrot . Cleese said that he and Chapman believed that " there was something very funny there , if we could find the right context for it " . The group felt that Chapman had the best acting skills in the group . Cleese complimented Chapman by saying that he was " particularly a wonderful actor " .

Chapman played the lead role in two Python films , Holy Grail and Life of Brian . He was chosen to play the lead in Holy Grail because of the group 's respect towards his straight acting skills , and because the other members wanted to play lesser , funnier , characters themselves . Chapman did not mind being filmed fully nude in front of a crowd in Life of Brian , but the scene , filmed in Tunisia , caused problems with the female Muslim extras .

= = = Other work = = =

Chapman and Douglas Adams wrote a pilot for a TV series in 1975 , Out of the Trees , but it received poor ratings after being broadcast at the same time as Match of the Day and only this initial episode was produced . In 1978 , Chapman co @-@ wrote the comedy film The Odd Job with McKenna , and starred as one of the main characters . Chapman wanted his friend Keith Moon to play a co @-@ lead role alongside him , but Moon could not pass an acting test , so the part went to David Jason who had previously appeared on Do Not Adjust Your Set with Pythons Idle , Jones , and Palin . The film was moderately successful .

During the 1970s , Chapman became increasingly concerned about the Python 's income and finances . He moved to Los Angeles in the late 1970s to avoid British income tax . He guest @-@ starred on several television series including The Big Show .

In 1976 , Chapman began writing a pirate film , Yellowbeard , which came out of conversations between Chapman and Moon while in Los Angeles . Moon had always wanted to play Long John Silver , so Chapman began to write a script for him . Moon died in 1978 and the work stalled ,

eventually being rewritten by McKenna , then by Peter Cook . The film , which starred Chapman as the eponymous pirate , also featured appearances from Cook , Marty Feldman , Cleese , Idle , Spike Milligan , and Cheech & Chong . It marks the last appearance of Feldman , who suffered a fatal heart attack in December 1982 . The project was fraught with financial difficulties , and at times there was not enough money to pay the crew . It was released in 1983 to mixed reviews . David Robinson , reviewing the film in The Times said " the Monty Python style of comic anarchy requires more than scatology , rude words and funny faces . "

Chapman published his memoirs , A Liar 's Autobiography , in 1980 , choosing the title because he said " it 's almost impossible to tell the truth " . He returned to Britain permanently after Yellowbeard was released . He became involved with the extreme sports club Dangerous Sports Club , which popularised bungee jumping . Chapman was scheduled to perform a bungee jump himself , but it was cancelled due to safety concerns .

= = = Final years = = =

After reuniting with the other Pythons in The Meaning of Life , Chapman began a lengthy series of U.S. college tours , talking about the Pythons , the Dangerous Sports Club and Moon , among other subjects . Saturday Night Live creator and Python fan Lorne Michaels persuaded Chapman to star in The New Show .

In 1988 , Chapman appeared in the Iron Maiden video " Can I Play with Madness " . He starred in a pilot of a proposed television series Jake 's Journey , but financial problems prevented a full series from being made . Chapman was intended to be cast in the Red Dwarf episode " Timeslides " , but died before filming started .

= = Personal life = =

Chapman first met his long term partner , David Sherlock in Ibiza in 1966 . He later described realising he was homosexual as " an important moment in my life " . He told close friends about his relationship , including Cleese and Feldman the following year . Chapman and Sherlock moved to Belsize Park in 1968 , and the pair enjoyed visiting gay clubs in Central London .

Chapman first disclosed his homosexuality in public on British jazz musician George Melly 's television show , becoming one of the first celebrities to do so . He was a vocal spokesman for gay rights , supporting the Gay Liberation Front . In 1971 , Chapman and Sherlock adopted John Tomiczek as their son . Chapman met Tomiczek when the adolescent was a run @-@ away from Liverpool aged 14 . After discussions with Tomiczek 's father , it was agreed that Chapman would become Tomiczek 's legal guardian . Tomiczek later became Chapman 's business manager and died of a heart attack in 1992 . In 1972 , Chapman supported the newspaper Gay News , which listed him as one of the publication 's " special friends " in recognition .

Later , during his college tour , Chapman mentioned that a television audience member had written to the Pythons to complain about having a gay group member , adding that the Bible said any man who lies with a man should be taken out and stoned . With other Pythons already aware of his sexual orientation , Idle jokingly replied that they had found the perpetrator and killed him . Both Sherlock and Tomiczek remained a constant in Chapman 's life . In the mid @-@ 1980s , having resettled in Britain , the three moved to Maidstone , Kent .

Chapman took up pipe smoking aged 15 , which continued for the remainder of his life . He began drinking heavily during his time at Cambridge and St Bartholomew 's , favouring gin . By the time Monty Python went on tour in 1973 , Chapman 's drinking had begun to affect his performance , causing him to miss cues to go on stage . He stopped drinking in Christmas 1977 , concerned at being able to act in Life of Brian successfully , and remained sober for the rest of his life .

= = Death = =

In 1988 , Chapman made a routine visit to a dentist , who found a small , but malignant tumour on

one of his tonsils , leading to both being removed via a tonsillectomy . The following year , the cancer had spread into Chapman 's spinal cord , where another tumour was surgically removed . Chapman had several chemotherapy treatments and surgeries during the final months of his life , but ultimately the cancer was declared inoperable . According to his brother , Chapman was visibly upset by the death of his mother that July , by which time he was terminally ill . Shortly afterwards , Chapman filmed scenes for the 20th anniversary of the first broadcast of Flying Circus , the final time he appeared on television .

Chapman died on 4 October 1989 in Maidstone Hospital . At the time of his death , he was being visited by Sherlock , brother John and his sister @-@ in @-@ law , and fellow Pythons Palin and Cleese , the latter of whom had to be led out of the room to deal with his grief . Peter Cook had intended to visit , but arrived too late and was visibly shaken by the news . Chapman 's death occurred on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the first broadcast of Flying Circus , and Jones called it " the worst case of party @-@ pooping in all history " .

= = = Memorial service = = =

The five surviving Python members had decided to stay away from Chapman 's private funeral to prevent it from becoming a media circus and to give his family some privacy . They sent a wreath in the shape of the famous Python foot with the message : " To Graham from the other Pythons with all our love . PS : Stop us if we 're getting too silly " . The Rolling Stones also sent a floral arrangement , saying " Thanks for all the laughs " .

A private memorial service for Chapman was held at St Bartholomew 's on 3 December , two months after his death . The service began with a chorus of the hymn " Jerusalem " sung in English with a mock Chinese accent . Cleese delivered a memorable eulogy to Chapman with a shock humour that he believed Chapman would have wanted , and later became the first person at a televised British memorial service to say " fuck " . Palin delivered a eulogy to Chapman , as did Idle , quipping that Chapman had decided to die rather than listen to Palin once again . Idle also led the other surviving Pythons and Chapman 's close friends and family in a rendition of the song " Always Look on the Bright Side of Life " from The Life of Brian . He closed by saying , " I 'd just like to be the last person at this meeting to say ' fuck ' . "

Ten years after Chapman 's death , his ashes were first rumoured to have been " blasted into the skies in a rocket " with assistance from the Dangerous Sports Club . In a second rumour , Chapman 's ashes had been scattered on Snowdon , North Wales .

= = Legacy = =

Since Chapman 's death , the speculation of a Python revival has been inevitably diminished . Subsequent gatherings of the Pythons have included an urn said to contain Chapman 's ashes . At the 1998 Aspen Comedy Arts festival , the urn was " accidentally " knocked over by Terry Gilliam , spilling the " ashes " on @-@ stage . The apparently cremated remains were then removed with a dust @-@ buster . Idle recalled meeting Sherlock saying " I wish he [ Chapman ] was here now " and Sherlock replied " Oh , but he is . He 's in my pocket ! " Asteroid 9617 Grahamchapman , named in Chapman 's honour , is one of six asteroids named after the Python members .

In 1997 , Sherlock allowed Jim Yoakum to start the Graham Chapman Archives . Later that year , the novel Graham Crackers : Fuzzy Memories , Silly Bits , and Outright Lies was released . It is a semi @-@ sequel to A Liar 's Autobiography , with Chapman 's works compiled by Jim Yoakum . A compendium of writings , Calcium Made Interesting : Sketches , Letters , Essays & Gondolas , also compiled and edited by Yoakum was published in 2005 in association with the David Sherlock and John Tomiczek trust . In 2000 , Chapman 's play O Happy Day was performed by Dad 's Garage Theatre Company in Atlanta , Georgia , with assistance of Cleese and Palin . In 2006 , the album and DVD Looks Like Another Brown Trousers Job was released , featuring a college lecture recorded in April 1988 .

In June 2011 , it was announced that Cleese , Jones , Gilliam and Palin would perform in a 3 @-@

D animated version of Chapman 's memoir A Liar ? s Autobiography : Volume VI . Co @-@ director Jeff Simpson worked closely with Chapman 's estate and the surviving Python members to " get this exactly right " . The film , titled A Liar 's Autobiography : The Untrue Story of Monty Python 's Graham Chapman , was shown at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2012 and premiered in the UK the following month as part of the BFI London Film Festival . The voices of Cleese , Gilliam , Jones , and Palin were spliced into commentary recorded by Chapman reading from his memoir and taped shortly before his death . The film 's official trailer quotes Chapman saying , " This is the best film I 've been in since I died . "

In September 2012 , a British Comedy Society blue plaque , to commemorate Chapman , was unveiled at The Angel pub in Highgate , North London , by Jones , Palin , Barry Cryer , Ray Davies and Carol Cleveland . Palin said , " This was Graham 's manor .... Highgate was his patch and he should be celebrated because he was a very good , brilliant , funny , nice , wise , kind man , who occasionally drank too much . " In December 2014 a green plaque funded by Leicestershire County Council was placed on Chapman 's former home in Burton Road , Melton Mowbray .

= = Filmography = =