

## Aardvarks Gala Dinner

It can't be, can it?

I am not sure that any of us can comprehend the enormity of the achievement.

To be clear, the Aardvarks predates the inter web (formalised by Tim Berners-Lee in 1990) by 7 years. The iPad by 27 years. The iPhone by 25 years.), whilst in the year of inauguration, Kajagoogoo's 'Too Shy' hogged the charts with Culture Club's Karma Chameleon and Tootsie was the blockbuster movie. The first Wrestle Mania event took place in Madison Square Garden, which I am reliably informed featured Steve Palmer in a tag team with Hulk Hogan. They were defeated by an illegal crotch hold from Mr T, tagged with Chris Mousley.

Nintendo was the fledgling entertainment system and seatbelts became mandatory. British Leyland launched the fabulous Austin Maestro and ITV launched 'Blockbusters'.

The fact is that in this day and age, nothing lasts like the Aardvarks - yes girls (or boys), whatever your own experience, it's a fact. The Aardvarks brand will shortly be available for licensing far behind the ranges of leisure wear currently featuring the sacred crest. Condoms, cigars, ice cream, batteries and Male gigolos are all queueing up to sign contracts.

And at the foundation of all of this is one man and an ideal. 'King Col' and his vision for creating a homeless hockey touring team drawing inspiration from a cage at London Zoo containing a single, sad burrowing creature which most people only knew about because of its alphabetical predominance. How can it have been that this vision still sustains such a fine group of people as assembled before me today?

Before I ruminate on this, I propose the first toast of the evening and ask you all to be on your feet to salute 'King Col'.

So to the characteristics that have sustained our movement other than the mild laxative effect of best bitter...

The first characteristic that I observe is blind obedience.

How else could one explain a willingness, even desperation, to attend the 'last ever' tour, year after year? How else could one explain acceptance of being placed in formations and positions that cannot hope to work and yet, time after time, deliver

Aardvark victory? How else could one explain the inevitability of Tolley being last man standing in the bar in the early hours? It's all about obedience and doing the right thing, as instructed. Anybody who has ever seen him frog marched out by a nightie wearing Mrs Tolley knows that I'm right.

I therefore ask you to take to your feet again for a second toast - blind obedience.

The second, of 35, characteristics that I observe is camaraderie.

The unique and powerful bond between the Aardvarks' members is impossible to understand for those unfortunate enough never to have been invited to join the cult, sorry, club.

I remember on the ferry back from a memorable evening on a mysterious island near Guernsey and looking across the deck to Niall. At that moment, and it was a moment, there was a fleeting look, just a look, which only a fellow Aardvark could have understood meant 'I am absolutely wankered and can barely stand'. It's those moments that make you realise just what you have joined.

Moreover, I'd like you to picture the scene.

It is a golf course and the final morning of the annual Aardvarks golf tournament. Considerable drink has been taken the night, and morning, before.

I am playing with Allott and a pale looking Iain Stokes who, having played a poor shot from the 6th tee, ventures into heavy rough in an effort to find his wayward ball. Being a public spirited person and a keen embracer of the camaraderie ethic, I go over to help him. We are adjacent to a busy dual carriageway. All of a sudden, Stokes' body goes into a kind of pike position and he hastens to a nearby shrub behind which, but in full view of dual carriageway users, he drops his trousers and delivers a significant explosive growing aid to the plant. Oaths are heard and considerable contortions are seen before he emerges from behind the bush, looking a little sheepish.

Wilks, I can't lie, I've just shat myself and am now commando. Can we keep this between the 2 of us?

I felt this to be a denial of the characteristic of camaraderie and therefore felt it my duty to tell everyone by shouting the news across the golf course, even running down the 4th fairway at one stage to urgently share the news with those waiting to tee off.

One really can't delay in conveying such news so that fellow members can offer support and encouragement to the unfortunate fellow.

Ladies and gentlemen, please be upstanding for a further toast - camaraderie!

My next observed Aardvark characteristic is loyalty.

I well remember on an early Aardvark tour (in fact my first one, and again to the Isle of Man), sitting in a curry house with my wing man, Pogo. He was a relatively shy and retiring individual whose mild manner betrayed nothing of the animalistic determination and commitment with which he was possessed on a hockey pitch. He was tall, muscular and apparently unflappable.

The two young ladies sitting opposite us in the curry house were under the mistaken impression that we were hot shot financiers who enjoyed water skiing from our powerboat moored on Lake Windermere and were looking to invest in property in and around Ramsey. We had a couple of million of liquidity and could be swayed with the right offer and inducement.

The fact that neither of us had a pot to piss in seemed to have been neatly side-stepped. The fact that we were sitting in one of Ramsey's less celebrated curry houses might also have given the game away.

It was only when Lucy (for that was her name), explained that she was the daughter of the chief of police for the island that we realised the potential trouble we were in due to our elaborate scene setting.

'What's your names?' enquired Lucy's friend, Cheryl.

I'm Colin Taylor said Pogo, quick as a flash.

And I'm his brother, Tag, I added.

The bewildered girls never understood why two chicken Baltis were never finished and the evening came to a speedy conclusion as Colin Taylor developed an urgent stomach complaint.

Ladies and gentlemen, please be upstanding for a further toast -loyalty.

Mercifully I am now at my final Aardvark characteristic, that of diversity.

Even the most ardent supporter of the Aardvarks will have realised over the years that there is no hockey playing quality control in respect of the people approached to join. I should know this better than many others.

Few will ever forget the sight of Todge, who should certainly have been given the leaflet on show jumping rather than hockey, taking up his customary position of left wing for the beginning of the second half. He was unperturbed by the whistle being blown to commence the half, as no member of the Aardvarks would ever pass him the ball.

An unfortunate deflection off a midfield opposition stick, however, propelled the ball at a leisurely pace 10 yards in front of Todge. He was unmarked and the situation demanded that he run after it.

What no-one had quite realised was that Todge was sufficiently relaxed about the game to have started to roll himself a cigarette. His stick was lodged under his arm.

Not one to waste the precious resource of tobacco, Todge duly broke into a trot, still with eyes on his roll up and the stick wagging back and forth under his arm. The national selectors were untroubled.

More recently the Aardvarks have pioneered the use of women in their playing squad. Ingeniously the selectors have ensured that such female members are the absolute cream of the hockey playing crop, giving leary eyed opposition players the most frightful nightmares in numerous games.

The only possible exception to this occurred recently in Cork where a good natured trawl of pubs to find a goal keeper for the next day's game unearthed a female creature from the black lagoon who first took a considerable shine to an anonymous Aardvark before delivering a performance the next day which drew comparisons with Black Adders 'bury me in a Y shaped coffin' lady Harrington such was the distance between her pads and kickers.

Still, the Aardvarks won.

A further toast then to diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will be relieved to hear that I feel I have said enough.

We are all privileged and fortunate to belong to such an astonishingly long lived and long loved club, filled with friends and the most brilliant memories. We will all have our own to treasure and I suggest that we make some more!

On this note, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to be upstanding for a final time and join me in toasting The Disillusioned Aardvarks.

**To the tune of Grand Old Duke of York:**

We Aardvarks came here to play, And were beaten by YMCA  
Disillusioned we're not, Despite being so hot  
Because the Carib boys made our day

[chorus]

***And when the Aardvarks drink  
And when the Aardvarks sing  
Be sure to raise your glass in toast  
To the mighty, burrowing king!***

They invited us to their Barbeque, And it was a right good do  
There was Carib and Rum, Filling up Lloyd's big tum  
So be careful it could happen to you

[chorus]

This morning all you could hear, Were complaints about Carib beer  
How it dried up your brain, That we'd never drink again  
But the Aardvarks will be back next year!

[chorus]

But now to the Isle of Man, Where it's true, it all began  
Colin Taylor in charge, The bar bill was so large  
The Tynewald declared us a clan!

[chorus]

And now we're back again, But slow and stooped with age  
It's time to dance, And take a chance  
On the Aardvarks global stage!

[chorus]

Ends (thank heavens)