

OBITUARY

JULIAN CORFIELD **(born 3 Nov. 1948; died 1 Jan. 2026)**

By Penelope J. Corfield © PJC 2026

Julian Corfield, who died peacefully on 1 January 2026 at the age of 77, loved order, accuracy and precision above all things. So he would have approved of his memorable day/month of departure - except that it was several years too soon. Julian was also known as Jules, Julo, and (when we were very young) as Julie. That name placed him in a rhyming sequence of we young Corfield kids: Penny, Ady, Julie, Alsie ...). But at some stage, Julian quietly asked us to stop calling him 'Julie', which we did, except in our memories.

Throughout his life, Julian was immensely consistent. He was serious-minded, clever, meticulous, and focused. He loved mathematics, chess, and precise music (eg. anything by Bach). He was personally reserved and reticent; and, as an adult, he spent long times on his own, completely content with his own company.

At the same time, Jules was notably kind, considerate, decent-minded, gentle, and caring. He worked well with others; and, in his later life, sought company more frequently than he did as a young man.

Above all, too, Julian had a droll and dry sense of humour, which initially could take people by surprise. He did not look like the sort of person who was constantly cracking jokes. (And his jokes were certainly not bawdy. Nor were they sardonic or hostile). But Jules always saw the funny side of life's ups and downs - and managed to laugh, however dryly. He also loved shared jokes and catch-phrases, at which he could laugh knowingly with his friends, revelling in the joint amusement.

One great testimony to the warmth that others felt for Julian was apparent in the two commemorative meetings that the Corfield family organised in early 2026. The first was held at lunch-time on Saturday 7 February 2026, at the Westcliff Hotel, Westcliff Parade, Southend. Over 50 people attended, some from the immediate family, but most from close at hand. They included: many good companions among his colleagues and former students at the Southend school where he taught maths; many friends and fellow members of the Southend Chess Club; a lively contingent of Julian's fellow workers at the charity Southend Age Concern; and some of his closest neighbours at the nearby block of flats, St John's Court, Westcliff Parade.

At a certain point, we launched into an Open Session, when anyone who wished was welcome to share their thoughts and feelings about Julian. There was absolutely no shortage of speakers. And the outcome was truly moving. There was no doubt that we were all talking about the same unassuming, modest person, who was so widely loved and appreciated. While Julian was personally reticent, he lived not in isolation but within active networks of true friendships.

A month later, on 7 March, we held a second commemoration, this time an early evening event, in a pub close to Victoria Station. It was devised to cater for friends and family within reach of London. Another 30+ people attended. We held another Open Session. And, as in Southend, it was intensely moving. Julian was not a flashy person. Never wanted to be. But his sincerity, his kindness, his readiness to help others (always unobtrusively), and his droll humour were a winning combination. He was much loved and appreciated, as countless old friends and Corfield/Hill family members testified. Julian would probably have been slightly staggered - and even mildly embarrassed - at the emotion that people expressed. But undoubtedly very cheered too!

Talking of emotions, the one time in his life that I ever saw Julian express very deep emotion was when we received, in November 1990, the terrible news that our brother Adrian (commonly known as Ady) had died at the age of 44. Jules was distraught. So was I; and we shared our grief. We were both born within two years of Ady, I being the older sibling and Jules the younger. And as kids we were a very close and happy team.

In that context, I was always impressed by how well Julian got on with his brother Adrian. The two of them could not have been more different. Adrian was out-going, gregarious, hating to be alone. Jules was the reverse. Adrian was very clever, but slapdash and casual about any task he was set. Julian - also very clever - was totally meticulous about everything. Adrian, as an adult, had a sequence of feisty girl-friends; and he loved passionately. By contrast, Julian (after some youthful yearnings were thwarted) became resolutely celibate by choice.

Yet, as kids, the two brothers always got on very well and played happily together. Indeed, I'm pretty sure that they appreciated their mutual differences. Neither would have been so happy with a pure carbon-copy. And it's worth recalling that Julian, although personally reticent, was no physical wimp. He was very fit throughout his life, going out for daily walks or runs, until his very last illness confined him to hospital. And as a fit young man, Julian played football robustly in the back garden with Ady. It was true, however, that, as they got older, Julian did seek his own quiet space, away from Adrian, who was always so restless and 'on the go'. Yet that did not detract from their mutual affection, which was based on long familiarity, as well as mutual respect.

By the way, my own partner in life, Tony, recalls that, when I introduced him to the Corfiel family for the first time (many years ago), Ady and Julian together immediately challenged him to a tough game of football. Luckily, Tony was a keen footballer himself; and enjoyed the rough-and-tumble. Eventually, Ady and Julian

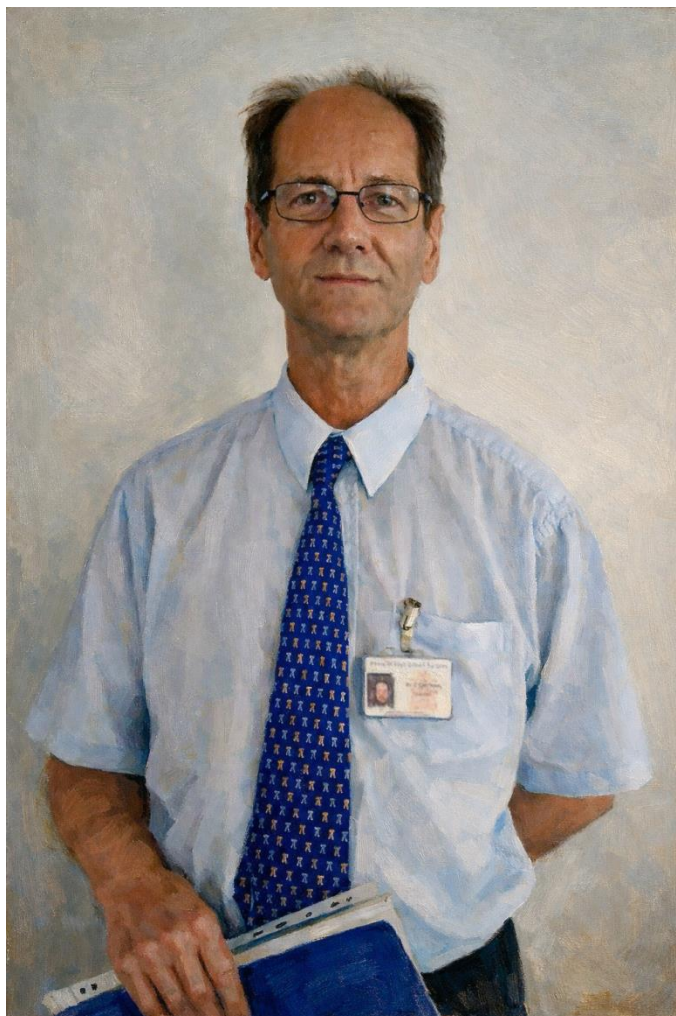
came indoors and indicated 'He'll do!' Was I pleased! At last I had my brothers' approval for my romantic choice (having earlier brought home sundry feeble suitors who could not pass the Corfi-test)! Moreover, Ady and Julian had helped me to make a wise choice - Tony and I being still happily together over sixty years later!

For himself, Julian had no doubts about his own life choices. He made his career teaching maths, and was supremely happy doing so. He loved his subject; he loved imparting it to others; and, in his spare time, he did maths puzzles for his own amusement. As a teacher, he was pleasantly eccentric - giving the children little nicknames (often based on the surnames). They seemed to enjoy this procedure, which indicated that he had taken individual cognisance of them all. And a number of former pupils recorded publicly their thanks for his inspirational teaching.

Chess was Julian's other grand passion in life. He played to a very high standard, though he did not quite get into the supremely elevated ranks of the Grand Masters. Moreover, there were times, when playing chess across the board, that Julian could get flustered, if his opponent was truculent or aggressive or otherwise disruptive. Hence one of Julian's purest pleasures was playing correspondence chess. He had time to think, slowly and carefully, before sending off his next move - and he did not mind waiting, patiently and calmly, for his opponent to send his own in return. Some of Julian's correspondence chess matches thus continued over many months, without a murmur of complaint or impatience from him.

Hence it was a total blow to Julian when correspondence chess lost its authenticity with the spread of ubiquitous laptop computing. People were no longer left in isolation to devise their own preferred moves but could simply ask the computer for help. Trust was quickly eroded. It became difficult to know whether one was playing a fellow human or a well-programmed computer. Julian was not pleased/ But he shrugged and got on with his life. And in his later years, he was

very happy playing across the board chess at the Southend Chess Club, where he made many friends.



**A fine recent photo of Julian Corfield (2025) -
indicating his robust frame
and the lines of humour round his mouth -
the photo being kindly shared with the Corfield family by
a young Southend friend,
Olivia Holbrook-Morris**

Eventually, Julian became ill with multiple cancers (almost certainly associated with his coeliac condition - which ran in the family). Then in late 2025, he was admitted to hospital locally - where he contracted pneumonia. As a notably independent person, Julian did not enjoy being in hospital, under the care and direction of others, Yet his close family members who visited and/or phoned him in these last weeks all reported that he was continually cracking jokes - and saying loving things. While therefore his end came far too soon, Julian's last weeks were not spent in agony. And at the very end, he died peacefully.

Before concluding, I can't resist adding one anecdote that became a family classic. It dates from when Julian was about nine or ten years old. (He always disputed the details, by the way; but I was a witness and I'm pretty confident that it's correct.) The context was an early morning Sunday ritual, when we kids went into the parental bedroom and shared a family snuggle, all of us together in or on the big bed. These were always happy times. Our father made up amusing stories to recount to us; and he played silly games, such as tossing us up and down in the blankets. Meanwhile, our mother smiled benignly, and enjoyed the pot of tea that I (as the oldest child) brought up for them, as soon as I was old enough to be entrusted with the task. It was her special Sunday morning treat.

On one particular Sunday morning, our father asked Julian if he would turn on the taps to run him a bath. Julian unhesitatingly left for the nearby bathroom and came back reporting that he had obeyed. It was a big, deep, old-fashioned bathtub that would not fill instantly. So some slow moments passed before our father asked Julian to check whether the bathtub was full. He came back, saying: No. Two further trips followed, each time Julian returning with another negative verdict.

Finally, our exasperated father asked just how much water was in the both?. None replied Julian. And when the paterfamilias gave every sign of exploding with

incredulity and wrath, Julian explained, simply: ‘Well, you said: turn on the taps! You didn’t say: put the plug in’.

What a triumph for Julian’s literalism! Did he do it because that was how he coped with the world? Or was he being sly, in effect teaching our father the perils of not being fully explicit? I’m personally convinced that Julian was just being himself - that is, totally literal-minded. He was certainly not consciously seeking to annoy. That was not his style!

Ultimately, our father, who was usually quick to laugh, was persuaded to see the funny side ... and the story became a family classic. What’s more, it remains a testament to the quietly quirky individualism that Julian maintained, unbrokenly, all his life!

Today, Julian’s ashes are now scattered (thanks to the kind services of his friend and close neighbour Tony Morris) around the block of flats in Southend where Julian spent the last years of his life. His flat was at the top of the building. It had magnificent views across the width of the Thames estuary. Julian loved to sit at his big front-room bow window, watching the rolling movements of the tides, the busy comings and goings of the Thames shipping, and the ever-changing British weather, with its clouds, rains, sunshine and rainbows. This look-out point on the cliffs at Southend is just the right location for Julian’s final home. He was loveable - and much loved. Julian Corfield: RIP.