



A life dedicated to charity fundraising

It was in 1966 when John and Pat Barrington's five-year-old son Paul was diagnosed with leukaemia. Within 15 months he was dead.

By a bizarrely tragic coincidence, 20 years later their son-in-law Richard was taken ill after returning from a business trip to the States and died within days – from the same disease.

For the past four decades the couple have dedicated their lives to raising funds for Leukaemia Research and have collected £1.4million for the cause from this area alone. John has been awarded an OBE for his work.

They founded the Richmond and Twickenham branch of the fund back in 1971 and John has held high office for six years since then.

The couple recently moved to Kew Riverside after spending most of their

married life in Strachill Road, Richmond and are now happily installed in a penthouse flat overlooking the Thames – as active and racing as ever.

They had three other children – one daughter is a consultant physician at Guy's hospital – and seven grandchildren. They will be celebrating their golden wedding with a party for the family at the Mid Surrey Golf Club later this month.

John, an accountant, born in Darjeeling, met Pat while they were working for the same company in Sloane Street. Both are Roman Catholics and it proved a perfect match. They married in 1956.

They had a blissful life until it was discovered their second son was terminally ill with the fatal blood cancer. Much less was known about the disease in the 1960s and despite the dedicated care of a loving medical team nothing could save him.

Forty years on – thanks to the huge advance in medical research made possible by the charity they helped fund – 75 per cent of children with the leukaemia virus can be cured.

There has been good progress in the treatment of adults too, although the success rate is not so high for many patients. The Barringtons' daughter Jane was four months pregnant when her 29-year-old husband was struck down and it was a bitter blow for the family.

"But it just made us all the more determined to ensure the research was intensified and that ways be found to make sure other families did not have to face what we had been through", said John, 71.

It was in 1966 that the couple moved from Kensington to Warren Avenue, Richmond and it was love at first sight – his time with a towel.

"We just adored the borough and knew it was the place we wanted to settle and bring up our family", explained Pat.

The couple immediately joined Richmond Conservative Association and John became its trustee and went on to hold many other positions. They retain their connections to this day.

They have been involved with countless charities during their four decades and John has been honorary auditor for such diverse projects as the London Ballet Circle, the British Society of Cinematographers, the Friends of St Benedict's School and Richmond Sapper Club.

Their main energies, though, have been thrown into the leukaemia research and they keep finding new ways of fundraising – starting off with traditional methods like flag days, coffee mornings, dances – and more recently launching the highly successful 20-

mile triathlon from Ham Common to Chelsea hospital.

The event attracts more than 4,000 riders and last year raised £366,000 through sponsorship. "It is such a fun day and is a joy to see the families enjoy themselves", John said. "Some arrive on specially adapted bicycles that can carry their children too and others turn up in in fancy dress."

Former footballer Gary Lineker has been one of the fund's most high profile and dedicated supporters and helps on the day in whichever way he can.

Leukaemia Research has been the Barringtons' passion for the best part of their adult lives – and they are as dedicated now as they were after Paul's death in the 1960s. "It is what I find most fulfilling", John explains. "I feel we have to give back what we have taken from this world and this is my way".

The Malcolm
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Column