

Ol Braddick, TomFest 30 March 2012, University of Bristol

Tomfoolery & Tomwisdom

- Tom – a larger than life figure with a zest for living in a way that made it a bit more complicated for him and a lot more exciting for the rest of us
- Flying to Greece for Peter Thompson's birthday party with a complete kit of disco lights in his hand baggage – which may have served also to distract customs from the other aids to good partying that he was carrying
- Persuading the Florida marine authorities that his experience piloting a narrowboat along English canals proved that he had the seamanship to navigate a large sea-going motor cruiser. For a series of VSS meetings in Sarasota, this served as a week long floating party boat, and Tom had a persuasive line about how renting the boat was really a rather economical alternative to staying in the Hyatt conference hotel – although I don't know if he persuaded the University of Bristol accountants of this.
- ECVP 1991 was scheduled in Lithuania, then part of the Soviet Union. Not scheduled was the collapse of the Soviet Union during the same week. Many participants were put off by this. Not Tom, who responded by driving right across Europe with a car full of Perception abstract booklets and enough command of Polish to cope with the border guards.

All the stories about Tom, his contributions to party life and his exotic means of transport might lead those who don't know him – and maybe some who do – as a flamboyant lightweight, a butterfly fluttering around the heads of the serious, earnest people who do real science. [I hope that the earlier session has persuaded you that Tom did science as real and as good as anyone here]. Hence my title – the visible Tomfoolery was the dressing, and the propulsive force, for a serious body of Tomwisdom, as an experimental visual scientist whose range we've heard about, and someone who threw his weight into the bodies which ensure that visual science gets effectively communicated.

A lot of this hinges on his symbiosis with Richard Gregory. We've had Richard's own memorial last year, and it's clear that Richard's own flamboyance and effervescence of ideas needed channelling to sustain the organized scientific productiveness that it deserved. Tom's personality and sense of what serious experimentation required made him just the right person to provide the bridge between Richard and rigorous science – and I saw him as having a very large part in ensuring that the Brain and Perception Lab was a serious player in British visual science for a couple of decades.

One of the purposes of Tom's cruising up and down the Florida Intracoastal waterway was to show the flag with a large banner for *Perception*. This was another area where Tom provided a large part of the role of a godfather and scoutmaster to keep Richard's brainchild on the rails. *Perception* has always had a distinctive flavour – of being just that bit more open minded and adventurous (i.e. less boring) than its peers, but never flaky or sensation-seeking. Tom takes a lot of the credit for that.

This session bears witness to how we all loved and admired Tom. I'm sure we'll have fun, but it will be a bit paler than the fun we'd have if Tom was here in person.