

Obituary: Professor Mark Duffett (1969-2025)

Tom Attah

info@tomattah.com

During his life, Dr Mark Duffett (1969-2025) became internationally recognised as a leading scholar in fan studies, cultural theory, film, and popular music. His work - particularly on fan studies and the life and legacy of Elvis Presley - resides among the most significant contributions to the field. Mark's research and scholarship combined intellectual clarity with deep cultural insight, and his research and writing on fandom, film, and popular music has shaped the thinking of students, colleagues, and researchers across the world.

Mark's academic journey began at St Hugh's College, University of Oxford, where he read Geography. His path then took him to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, where he achieved his MA, before returning to the University of Wales to complete his PhD - *Understanding Elvis: Presley, Power and Performance*. During this time, he published his first book-length work on popular music and culture - *Bryan Adams: a fretted biography* (1994). That early trajectory - moving between institutions, countries, and communities - mirrored the kind of scholar Mark became; rigorous yet curious, inclusive and sharing, and deeply committed to fostering meaningful conversations within and beyond the academy. Mark joined the University of Chester as a lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies in 2003 and was appointed Associate Professor in 2016.

In his scholarly writing, Mark brought a rare sensitivity to the emotional and cultural significance of popular music. His multiple journal articles, book chapters, and editorial projects for prestigious journals including *Popular Music and Society* and *The Journal of Popular Music Studies* are illustrative of the ways he took popular culture seriously - as an object of study, as a repository of memory, and as a shared social space. His monograph *Understanding fandom: An introduction to the study of*

IASPM Journal vol.15 no.1 (2025)

Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music

ISSN 2079-3871 | DOI 10.5429/2079-3871(2025)v15i1.17en| www.iaspmjournal.net

media fan culture (2013) analyses ‘fan’ as a contemporary identity in contemporary society and is definitive in the field. *Counting down Elvis: His 100 finest songs* (2018) and *Elvis: Roots, image, comeback, phenomenon* (2020) explore the long-standing cultural fascination with Elvis Presley, and showcased Mark’s ability to write with care and purpose, resisting cynicism, and reminding us that what matters to people in their everyday lives deserves critical attention.

Mark was also a gifted and generous speaker, and his keynote lectures at international conferences in Finland, Holland, Portugal and Russia were always marked by precision, warmth, and a quiet but unmistakable charisma. His colleagues within IASPM will remember his sustained contributions to the organisation - not only his academic insight, but his collegiality, his kindness to early-career researchers, and his calm commitment to fairness and community. His presence at conferences was a comfort to many, and a joy to others: he would offer time, conversation, encouragement, and the gentle humour that became one of his hallmarks.

He was also a fan - someone who understood the pleasures and complexities of cultural devotion. That understanding shaped his research, and also his friendships: he was able to meet people where they were, and to listen with sincerity. His Christian values informed his approach to others in quiet and consistent ways, evident in his generosity, his refusal of ego, and the dignity with which he treated others. Outside of his academic life, and when not enjoying various cultural adventures with his long-term partner Julie, Mark was an enthusiastic and skilled angler, finding peace and patience in the rituals of fishing.

Mark was still writing at the time of his sudden and unexpected passing. His final edited collection, *Re-thinking Elvis* (Oxford University Press) and his chapter on popular music autobiography, and on the place of fandom memory and identity in contemporary life (Bloomsbury) - will be published posthumously. These final texts are important, not only for their content, but for the voice they carry: a voice that helped shape the field, and which will continue to do so.

Mark’s death is a profound loss to the communities he helped build, and to the many students, colleagues, and friends whose lives and studies he enriched. But what he made and what he gave remain. His scholarship, his kindness, and his example endure - quietly, graciously, and unmistakably.

The University of Chester arranged a memorial gathering of family, friends, colleagues and students to celebrate Mark’s life and work on Friday the 16th of May at 2.30pm at the Senate House, Exton Park, Chester. All who knew Mark and who were able to attend were welcome.