

Mike Staunton (1956–2026)

An Appreciation

A tribute to a scholar, a builder of data and a generous friend, whose work underpins much of what the profession knows about long run investment returns.

By Bernd Hanke PhD

Mike Staunton died suddenly in August, only weeks after friends had last seen him in Bologna, deep in conversation about research and football. For more than forty years he was part of the fabric of London Business School (LBS), and for almost as long a fixture of the international quantitative finance community. He was the colleague who quietly built and maintained the data everyone else relied on, the teacher who could make a numerical method feel obvious, and the man with the broad smile who always wanted to know how your work, and your team, were getting on.

One of our partners, Bernd Hanke, had been in close touch with Mike since he graduated from London Business School with a PhD in finance. Over the years, Mike shared his research with us and met frequently with us. He was also always generously willing to share his unique data with us.

Forty years at Sussex Place

Mike arrived at London Business School in 1983 as an MBA student, in the intake the School still records as MSc19, graduated in 1985 and never really left. He stayed on for a PhD in Finance and then, from the late 1990s, took charge of the London Share Price Database, the record of UK share prices and returns stretching back to 1955 and one of the School's great research assets.

Few people outside empirical finance appreciate what it takes to keep a database like that accurate: the delistings, capital changes, renamings and the thousand small judgements that decide whether a historical return is right or merely plausible. Mike made those judgements for a quarter of a century. A generation of research on UK markets rests on them, usually without a footnote.

Alongside Elroy Dimson and Paul Marsh he also edited and produced the LBS Risk Measurement Service, the quarterly compendium of betas and risk measures for UK shares that the School has published since 1979. It was characteristic work: unglamorous, exacting, and relied upon by far more people than ever knew his name.

Triumph of the Optimists and the Yearbook

The work for which Mike will be most widely remembered began at the turn of the millennium. With Dimson and Marsh he assembled a full century of returns on equities, bonds, bills and inflation across sixteen countries, first as a millennium study with ABN AMRO and then, in 2002, as *Triumph of the Optimists: 101 Years of Global Investment Returns*. The book changed how investors thought about the equity risk premium, replacing estimates drawn largely from one fortunate market with evidence from countries that had lived through wars, hyperinflation and market closures.

From it grew the *Global Investment Returns Yearbook*, published every year since 2000 under the ABN AMRO, Credit Suisse and latterly UBS banners, and now covering 35 markets and more than 125 years of data. “DMS” became the profession’s shorthand for the long-run numbers, and the DMS Dataset a resource for researchers and practitioners worldwide. Dimson and Marsh wrote much of the prose and gave the talks; Mike built and maintained the engine underneath. The 2017 edition received the top accolade at the Savvy Investor Awards, but the more telling recognition is that for two decades asset allocators, actuaries, consultants and regulators have treated its tables as the authority on what markets have historically delivered.

Teacher, author, columnist

Mike was a teacher before he was a database director. From 1985, the year he finished his MBA, he taught spreadsheet modelling with Mary Jackson, then Assistant Professor of Decision Sciences at LBS, and the partnership culminated in *Advanced Modelling in Finance Using Excel and VBA* (Wiley, 2001). For well over a decade it sat on the desk of every quant who had to turn a textbook formula into something that actually ran: efficient frontiers, Black–Scholes, binomial trees and Monte Carlo, each worked through step by step with the code supplied. It taught a great many of us that implementation is where understanding is tested.

He supported teaching at LBS over many years, on electives and student projects, and taught at universities in the UK, Hong Kong and Switzerland. From the early 2000s he had a particularly long association with the quantitative finance group at what was then Cass and is now Bayes Business School, where he taught Numerical Methods on the MSc programmes and remained an encouraging presence at the Financial Engineering Workshops long afterwards. Those of us who now teach programming to quants at Bayes are walking a path he helped to lay.

For many years he also wrote a regular column for *Wilmott*, trying out new numerical methods, saying plainly where they worked and where they did not, and illustrating each with a few lines of code. That column was the whole man in miniature: he never met a new method he did not want to test and never tested one without asking how it could be made useful to someone with less time than he had. His research appeared in the *Journal of Banking & Finance*, the *Financial Analysts Journal*, the *Journal of the Operational Research Society* and *Quantitative Finance*, among others: some thirty papers and, by one count, 1,800 citations, though he was the last person who would have counted.

Mike the person

Anyone who met Mike at a conference will recognise the picture. He was at the Bachelier Congress in Bologna this July, as he was at the International Conference on Computational Finance and most other meetings on the circuit, not so much to present as to listen: asking about the paper, asking about the family, and steering the conversation, sooner or later, towards football. One long-standing friend described him as “in many ways a true English gentleman”, and the phrase fits (courteous, understated, unfailingly generous with his time) provided one adds the infectious laugh and the smile that could be spotted from the far side of a lecture theatre.

He gave back to the School in the plainest ways. He supported the MSc19 (1985) Scholarship, was a member of the Sussex Place Club, and in 2025 served as Reunion Class Chair for his cohort’s fortieth anniversary, rounding up the people he had sat beside as a student four decades earlier. Elroy Dimson and Paul Marsh, who worked alongside him for longer than anyone, both shared the same memories when the news came out: the depth of his knowledge and the warmth with which he shared it. Elroy put it simply: Mike’s “warmth and quiet dedication made working with him a privilege”.

The community of people who do finance with code and data has lost one of its kindest and most constant members. GSI had many close interactions with Mike on research matters and he generously shared advice and data with us. Some of us have been close friends with him over many years.

The Yearbook will go on, because Mike built things to last and documented them so that others could carry them on. So will the congresses and workshops, though the coffee breaks will have a gap in them where he used to stand. London Business School has opened an online memorial book for his family, and those who knew him are adding to it. Our thoughts are with them. We at GSI, and Bernd in particular, will miss him and his input, and his generous personality very much. He will be missed more than he would ever have believed.

Sources

- [Remembering Dr Mike Staunton, LBS alumnus and colleague](#) – London Business School, 8 September 2026
- [Obituary Mike Staunton](#) – Bachelier Finance Society, by Laura Ballotta, 21 September 2026
- [LBS faculty recognised for publishing excellence](#) – London Business School, 2017
- [Global investment returns](#) – Cambridge Judge Business School, Centre for Endowment Asset Management