

George Grahamslaw – tribute read by his son Colin at his funeral

Dad was born on 13th January 1934, the eldest of 3 boys to Thomas and Isabella

He talked of his earliest memories in a piece he wrote from Broughton MacDonald Church

I was five years old when the war started in 1939, and so my earliest memories are of times very different to those in which five-year olds live now. My home with my father, mother and two younger brothers, Douglas and Gordon, was a top floor flat at 4 East London Street, which was to be my home for 35 years. My father was a railway engine driver and so was exempt from military service. His base was at the St Margaret's yard in Piershill where Meadowbank Stadium now is. With a shift pattern of 26 different starting times in each year, his presence around the house was very irregular and so much of the work of bringing up three children fell on my mother. When my father was on night shift there would be no trams running so he would have to walk to and from his work in all weathers, and with no street lights it would be very dark. It was a hard and very dirty job and he was determined that his family would not follow in his footsteps - the sacrifices that he and my mother made for my brothers and myself were not in vain as two of us followed careers in accountancy and the other in insurance. Life at home was dominated by war conditions of rationing and night-time blackout. With no TV, it was the radio that we depended on for news, information and entertainment. Sleep was often broken by the air raid sirens and the need to two to the shelter in the back green. The sirens and the drone of the German bombers as they made their way to Clydebank and other strategic targets in the West of Scotland still evoke powerful memories. The blackout also brings back memories of travelling up and down Leith Walk with myself walking, holding onto the pram in which one-year-old Gordon lay and three-year-old Douglas was seated, presumably oblivious to the problems and worries facing my mother as she coped with looking after her father who lived in Pirrie Street, Leith, as well as managing affairs in her own home. As well as the blackout, the other huge impact on our lives at that time was rationing. Everything was rationed and, as well as cash, you had to have coupons to make purchases of food and clothing. For food you had to be registered with a retailer, and for us this meant a journey to Whitelaw's on the corner of Leith Walk and Brunswick Street to get the meagre allowances of groceries. My mother was very skilled in spinning these out and yes, I remember dried egg (it tasted like blotting paper) and the small butter allowance being mixed with margarine to make it to further. Nothing was wasted and you ate what was put down in front of you. 'Hunger makes good kitchen' was a favourite phrase of my mother'.

Dad attended East London Street Primary, followed by the Royal High School up at Carlton Hill.

Out of school he joined the cubs and scouts first at the Waverly YMCA then after the War he joined the Broughton Place Scout troop started by Tommy Thompson enjoying summer camps in Biggar – transported there by removal van - and venturing abroad to Kanderstag in Switzerland.

Royal High saw Dad introduced to rugby and the start of an involvement that would last most of his adult life in one way or another. As a schoolboy he moved through the school teams making his way in the School first XV and being selected for the Edinburgh Schools team, he also represented the school at Cricket, in his final year playing with his youngest brother Gordon.

After school he moved to play for the Royal High FP team representing them on around 140 occasions. With a break for National Service with the RAF in the North of England he said that

when he returned from Service he was as fit as he had ever been and it was at that point he was selected first for Edinburgh and then for trials for Scotland. Whilst he never got his cap he was a travelling reserve for the Scotland team in the 5 Nations for one season and faced the mighty All Blacks for a Combined Edinburgh / Glasgow team. He was also selected for the co-optimists on more than one occasion.

Unfortunately, further representative honours were cut short with a broken leg, ironically picked up before rugby training at Murrayfield while playing football.

Following the end of his playing days he tried coaching and served as treasurer for Royal High FP, but he decided this wasn't for him and he picked up the whistle spending the next 10 years refereeing across the central belt of Scotland. When he then hung up his whistle he became a referee assessor and coach which allowed to continue to spend Saturday afternoons in clubhouses across Scotland continuing friendships made on the pitch.

He often talked of practicing line out calls on the train or on New Year's Eve dropping the kit at left luggage at Waverly ready for the train the next morning down to the borders for New Year's Day game.

Dad had considered going into teaching when he left school, but felt he could not face the financial burden of the training required so he took up an accountancy apprenticeship with Charles Burrows in Palmerston Place Edinburgh.

From there he moved to Rossleigh Limited a motor vehicle distributor, then the construction industry beckoned with Crudens based out in Musselburgh, then Ryedale Scotland Limited before joining W&JR Watson in 1969.

Dad would remain with Watson's until retirement, being appointed to the board of directors in 1974, before assisting in a management buy out of the company with Sandy Watson in 1987. He retired in 1996.

Dad married Betty in 1968, they met through mutual friends – rugby on Dad's side and the Women's League of Health and Beauty on Betty's. Once married Dad moved out of East London Street and in to a new build with Betty in Strathalmond Park on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Colin was born in 1970 followed by Kirsty in 1974. In the early 80's the family moved to Riding Park, a new development built by Watsons in Barnton overlooking the Royal Burgess and there they stayed until Betty's failing health prompted the move to Lyle Court.

Family holidays were spent in the UK in cottages across the south of Scotland, Devon and Yorkshire, within one exception being a flight to Jersey. However, once the kids had left home the travel bug was re-ignited and Dad and Betty took to cruising the seas, travelling all round the world, never visiting the same place twice if it could be helped.

Dad's church involvement started at an early age when he was taken to the infant class of Broughton Place Church. This was to be the start of a journey of over 80 years. His Broughton Place connection continued through Sunday school, Bible Class, Young People's Association, Dramatic Club, and as a Sunday school teacher. Sunday school Christmas parties and summer picnics (which were big affairs) were looked forward to with great anticipation. There were summer camps at Broomlee in West Linton, Meigle in Perthshire, and these were hugely enjoyable under the

leadership of Non Mackie, Rose Grant and the unforgettable Ronnie Tait. His involvement continued into adult life first as an elder, he was ordained by Rev Alasdair Elders in 1975 and then on the Kirk Session where he served as treasurer. He was part of the project team that redeveloped the downstairs area of the church and served on the offering teams responsible for counting the church offering. He declined a long service certificate as he felt he was not worthy of one.

In retirement the golf course beckoned and Dad was a regular at the Royal Burgess managing to balance his handicap between being high enough to regularly win the money but not too high to attract the calls of bandit.

He also continued his curling career which had started in the construction leagues with Watsons with Corstorphine Curling Club.

Dad enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren, Issy, Abi, Megan and Struan and was always keen to hear of their latest activities and adventures.

Goerge was a letter writer, penning annual updates to go with Christmas cards – when his children went off to university every week a letter would be posted, on Sunday to Kirsty and on Monday to Colin (the Monday one also contained the Scotsman's Monday sports pages) the letters in his doctor like script would be long and detailed except for the odd occasion where one child or the other had missed a call home in which case it was not unknown for a single page of A4 to arrive with the home telephone number on it asking if this number had been mislaid.

When Betty fell ill Dad became her full-time carer looking after her with love and devotion as dementia slowly took its toll. Betty's illness led to the decision to move from Riding park to Lyle Court and in Lyle Court Dad found a role as Secretary of the owners' group and unofficial auditor of Lyle Court finances.

In his final years Dad found his failing mobility a great source of frustration but still took pleasure in reading and sudoku. He used his computer to stay in touch with the world being a heavy user of the BBC news website.

Dad's life was shaped by commitment - to family, to church, to rugby, to work, and especially to Mum. He showed us, not by speeches but by example, that you do your duty, you keep your word, and you get on with things. We've all been shaped by that example.

Colin Grahamslaw

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