

A celebration of the life of



Geoffrey Kidson

1927 - 2019

1.30pm, Thursday 14 February 2019
Oxford Crematorium, Memorial Chapel

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Geoffrey's life

Some more now about Geoffrey's life and times. He was born (we think at, or close to home) in Bilston near Wolverhampton on 29 November 1927 - the first of two sons to parents Norman and Vera.

So what was going on in the world then? Stanley Baldwin was the British Prime Minister and Josef Stalin had just come to power in the Soviet Union. The American classical singer Leontyne Price and actress Janet Leigh (of *Psycho* shower scene fame) were both born around this time, and an 11-year-old violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, was making his concert debut in New York.

I expect most of this would have felt a very long way from the West Midlands. The family lived with Norman's mother at Greenbank, a large, spacious house built by her late husband. Set in about two and half acres of garden, it must have been a wonderful place for Geoffrey and his younger brother John to explore and play in with their friends.

It was, though, also quite a strict, traditional and matriarchal household - dominated by links to and regular attendance at the local Congregational Church. Delivery of a newspaper to the house on Sundays was forbidden by Geoffrey's grandmother, so Geoffrey and his father had to collect their *Sunday Times* from a neighbour.

The brothers attended the local Queen Victoria Primary School, from where Geoffrey won a scholarship to Wolverhampton Grammar School.

There, he showed his prowess as a sportsman (he was a gifted footballer), and he was an active member of the school Scout troop - an experience that gave him a lasting love of hill walking, in the Lake District, the Scottish

Highlands and other places. In his seventieth year, he even managed to reach the summit of Great Gable - no small achievement, and I think another sign of his inner strength and resolve.

Geoffrey succeeded academically too, as one of a number of pupils from his year to gain places at Oxford University. What a contrast that must have been - to be pitched into such a refined and privileged world.

Arriving at Merton College just after the Second World War, Geoffrey was surrounded by lots of older and seemingly far more worldly students, taking up their deferred places after returning from military service.

Having studied Classics at school, he started a degree in what was then called 'Greats' - a mix of ancient literature, history and philosophy.

Geoffrey's memoirs reveal that (not unlike many students to this day), he spent his first year mainly *"drinking a lot of beer, going to foreign films and being unintellectual"*, but also making lots of friends. During his second year, though, his family life went through a series of major upsets.

His grandmother died, the family home was put up for sale and his parents separated. This meant that Vera returned with John to her family in Gloucestershire, and his father gradually lost contact with the children.

Geoffrey's studies were definitely affected by this. He began to find the Greek and Latin language parts of his course difficult to cope with, so he made what must have been a brave and difficult decision to switch to History for his final year.

After university, it was time for two years' National Service. Geoffrey served as a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force, teaching raw recruits the basics of Maths and Civics. The latter subject covered a wide field in Geoffrey's hands - he often got his classes to talk about and appreciate recent films!

From the RAF, Geoffrey applied for various positions in the Civil Service, which he joined in September 1952 - relocating to Bolton in Lancashire as an Inland Revenue tax inspector. And it was there, the following spring, that he met Margaret, who was making and serving hot pot at the local tennis club he'd joined.

Now I understand Margaret's hot pots were rather good, and I imagine this was just one of the many attractions that quickly brought them closer together, to become engaged in October 1953.

There's a lovely picture of the two of them, standing slightly self-consciously and sheepishly outside Margaret's parents' home on the day of their engagement. On the back, Geoffrey had noted '*our first photograph together*'. How different from relationships today!

They were married in June 1954 - the portrait on the front of the order of service is just one of many fabulous photos from that day. What a handsome fellow!

Mike, Anne and Caroline came along over the next few years, and the family moved between a number of different locations dictated by Geoffrey's work.

After Bolton, they went to Wolverhampton, where Geoffrey and Margaret built a new social life; reconnecting with some of his former school friends. That idyllic period was followed by a short and more ill-fated spell of work in

Kettering, which caused Geoffrey great distress and from which he had to fight hard to extricate himself. This seems to have triggered the first of a number of periods of depressive illness, to which he remained prone for many years.

But through all that change and challenge, he and Margaret proved themselves to be strong, stoic and practical - raising a close-knit and happy family, whose easy bond is so evident between Mike, Anne and Caroline today.

And what a diverse range of career paths you've gone on to follow - publishing, social care, music and academic study: all valuable and important things of which I'm sure both parents were very proud.

After retiring from the Inland Revenue, Geoffrey ran a small tax consultancy firm set up by his colleague and friend Bill Reid, for a few years. Sadly though, he and Margaret were not able to enjoy a long retirement together, with her dying from Ovarian Cancer in 1995.

Geoffrey was devastated by this loss, but gradually recovered his spirits to become actively involved in the University of the Third Age (U3A), where he led the History and Playreading groups and made many new friends, including June Fox, to whom he became very close. The last entry in his memoirs is of him and June enjoying a U3A outing to Wales together in 2009.

He also of course enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren: Eleanor, Isabel and Emily, including holidays abroad and in the UK. Eleanor and Isabel - you have fond memories of meeting your grandfather in Dovedale for several consecutive Easter holidays to walk and enjoy the countryside.

And Emily - you remember going round to Geoffrey's flat after school, looking through his photo albums and occasionally reading parts in plays for the Playreading Group. He retained his interest in football all his life, and was a lifelong supporter of Wolves - currently seventh in the Premiership, which he must have been pleased about!

Geoffrey enjoyed travelling. During 'the summer of love' in 1967, the family went to visit Margaret's parents who'd emigrated to California. There were also regular trips to France and Italy, and Geoffrey and Margaret later went on several cruises together.

But at home, once retired, he kept a pretty small footprint - moving from Hamilton Road to Diamond Court, then the Lady Nuffield care home and finally Greengates nursing home; all within a short distance of each other around Summertown.

After a few months of declining health, Geoffrey died peacefully on 2 February. I sense he was completely at ease about reaching the end of his life. An erudite, calm and highly-capable man whose time had come.