

## Tribute

Harry Mellanby was born to Lil and Harry on 6th October 1930 in the village pub in Redmarshall in County Durham. They then moved to live in another pub, on the estate of Viscount Londonderry, which was run by Harry senior's mother, who was at one time the oldest licensee in the country. Next door was the Dobbins family who trained sheepdogs, which set Harry on a life-long love of border collie dogs, one of which his own family would later have, the much-loved Jess.

Later on the family moved to 'The Hamilton Russell Arms' in Thorpe Thewles, near Stockton-on-Tees where Harry went to primary school. By this time and at the outbreak of war, his sister Margaret had been born. Harry went to Sunday School where he didn't always see eye to eye with the vicar and on one occasion tore up his Sunday School Book. Harry was also a scout. The group was asked to help the soldiers stationed nearby to help them find their way home during the blackout but Harry's mother said no. Maybe, knowing that Harry was a mischievous boy, she thought that he would send them in the opposite direction! He and his mates certainly spent hours roaming around the countryside with sticks, shooting at Germans and they would have witnessed the large-scale bombing of Stock-on-Tees.

Harry went to Newham Grange Secondary School in Stockton where he achieved his school certificate, much to the surprise of his piano teacher as he failed to show any interest or aptitude in learning the piano. At the age of sixteen Harry had been taken to a school party by a friend of his, where he met Jean who was helping with refreshments.

Never being backward in coming forward Harry asked Jean out and she agreed as long as the friend, Margaret, went too. The threesome didn't last long though, much to the annoyance of Margaret's parents who had earmarked Harry as future son-in-law material. Future dates for Harry and Jean were the cinema, walking, playing tennis, cycling on their tandem through the Dales and to Youth Hostels, and playing a lot of sport: netball for Jean and football and cricket for Harry. There is a lovely photo of the two of them on the beach at Redcar, where Harry would swim in the icy waters of the North Sea.

Instead of continuing with his Highers, Harry chose to do his National Service at the age of 18, in the Navy, and was posted to Portsmouth, which he loved, possibly helped by the fact that he oversaw dishing out the tots of rum. Harry was by this time engaged to Jean and he returned to work for local government in Billingham-on-Tees and they married on 28th February 1953.

In the years that followed, Harry made moves which advanced his experience and career in local government. Swadlincote near Burton-on-Trent, was the first where he and Jean lived in a flat above a dry cleaner's shop. John was born in 1954, in a nursing home next to the brewery in Burton and poor Jean couldn't stand the smell. There was then Aldridge near Birmingham, where Steve was born in 1956, then a year in Canvey Island, followed by Thorne, near Doncaster where the family lived in Hatfield and Elizabeth was born in 1962, and then Dronfield in Derbyshire. The growing family finally moved to Street in 1966 where Harry worked for Street Urban

District Council which eventually merged into Mendip District Council and where Harry worked in Wells and finally Shepton Mallet as Deputy Chief Executive. Harry took early retirement at the age of fifty-four although he did continue to work as clerk to the Parish council in Street until the age of sixty.

Harry was respected by his colleagues and although I'm sure he was pleased to hear the comment, "I don't think we can afford to lose someone of the calibre of Mr Mellanby" when he applied for early retirement, he did have his fingers crossed under the table in the hope that it would be granted. He was responsible for the building of Strode swimming pool, not an entirely altruistic act as he loved swimming, but he didn't talk much about work once he'd got home. He didn't like squandering money as he was always aware that it was the taxpayers funding projects and he was almost embarrassed to have a street named after him and asked Jean to keep it quiet. He began the twinning with the French town of Notre Dame de Gravinchon and he and Jean met and hosted some interesting people. He never ever spoke French however although he did come to be as known 'Le Savarin' because like that dessert he was able to soak up alcohol! Harry was also a member of the Roundtable, a Lion and a Mason.

Harry loved his three children John, Steven and Elizabeth and was very proud of them all. Although Jean was the main stay at home during their early years Harry did get up in the night and changed nappies. Their holidays as a family were very often spent with the wider family in Saltburn but later on Cornwall became the main destination. They would never book anywhere, just turn up at B and B establishments and ask for accommodation for five. Places like Newquay, Looe, Polperro and Falmouth elicit lovely memories and time was spent lazing on the beach, bodyboarding and swimming.

As the family grew larger and Harry had more time he became a hands-on 'da' or grandad and great-grandad and has five grandchildren, Kristian, James, Matt, Harry and Isobel, and four great-grandchildren, Isaac, Freya, Isla and Everly. Harry and Jean visited America on many occasions to see Steven and Marjorie and when their son Matt was born and he needed special feeding care in the early weeks, it was Harry who got up every two hours to see to this.

He also spent a lot of time with young Harry who lived with his grandparents until he was three, and he had the talent of getting him to sleep before young Harry ever got the chance to see the cows, the main aim of the walk. Harry always referred to Isobel as his favourite granddaughter and Isaac as his favourite great-grandson, 'favourite' being synonymous with 'only' but I'm sure all his offspring have felt Harry's unconditional love and support, whatever their age, gender or location.

Harry's latter years have been spent enjoying time with Jean and the family and his local friends. Harry always loved watching and following sport: Middlesbrough, Sheffield and Liverpool being the favourite football teams and he enjoyed watching cricket. He frequented the Victoria Club in Street and never lost his love of beer as his friends will no doubt testify. He enjoyed gardening and provided the vegetables for home-cooked meals, although he never ventured into the kitchen himself. Potatoes, beans, mangetout, courgettes, carrots, spinach and lettuce were the main

crops and I was told he grew a mass of lamb's lettuce which he could devour in one go.

Apart from holidays in America whenever they visited Steven and his family, he and Jean did a lot of travelling and when flying became too uncomfortable for Jean, they took to going on cruises: the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Baltic amongst them. They loved meeting interesting people and trying exotic foods although Harry was always a meat and two veg man by choice. He never lost his northern accent and insisted on using the terms that he had always used: 'aye' 'yon end' and 'eats', as in 'Do tha' do eats in this pub?'. He and Jean would go down to Yeovil on a Monday, have lunch and take in a film whatever it happened to be. They have always enjoyed each other's company, had respect for one another and been each other's best friend. Jean's poem, her sonnet 'Out of the Ether' which she sent to him on Valentine's day a few years ago, sums up so beautifully their relationship: in harmony and eternal.

### Out of the Ether

Were we perhaps born on the same ley line

Did our paths cross by ancient design?

All predestined from the very start,

This true cosmic affair of the heart.

Was it some random number multiplied

The 'Lottery of Life'. I'm mystified

That you came to me from infinite space

And at that meeting, I knew your face.

The stars will blacken, then fade and die,

We will still be together, you and I

In another shape, in another form

Seismic waves causing nuclear storm.

When a new universe comes out of the mist

Time will stand still, as though we just kissed.