

A CEREMONY TO CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF
ROY FREDERICK DAVIDSON

8th April 1932 – 25th August 2017

held at

South Oxfordshire Crematorium

and Memorial Park

on 18th September 2017



Humanist Celebrant

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ENTRANCE

String Quartet No. 1 in C major, Op. 49: 2nd Movement, Moderato – Dimitri Shostakovich

OPENING WORDS

Good afternoon everyone. We're here to celebrate the life of Roy Frederick Davidson who died at the John Radcliffe Hospital on 25th August aged 85.

INTRODUCTION

I should introduce myself. My name is Ian Willox. I'm a celebrant for Humanists UK. Roy was a Humanist. His family have asked for a Humanist funeral – a non-religious funeral. That doesn't mean anti-religious. This is a ceremony for everyone – including those with a religious faith.

THOUGHTS ON LIFE AND DEATH

With or without religion, one of the important things a funeral can do is provide memories. So that Roy can live on in our memories at least.

And in Roy's case there's a surfeit of memories.

So let's remember...

TRIBUTE

Roy was born in 1932 in Sefton General Hospital in Liverpool, the eldest child of Frederick and Edith Davidson – his sisters were Rita and Rosalie.

Frederick, Roy's father, had become a merchant seaman at 14. Latterly he drove trams in Liverpool – right through the Blitz – and buses.

Roy was evacuated during the War – along with his Mother and his sisters - to Wrexham and then to *Llansanan* in Denbighshire, North Wales in 1941 – and placed with the Jones family – Welsh speaking farmers. He attended the local Welsh speaking school but found it difficult not speaking the language. He also helped out on the farm. He described it as “breaking up cowpats on a hill”.

Roy didn't enjoy everything about being evacuated but he had escaped from his rather tough father for the Jones's and he had escaped the city of Liverpool for the North Wales countryside. He maintained that love of the countryside, particularly as a cyclist.

Roy stayed in touch with the Jones family for decades afterwards.

Roy's first job, at 15, was as a cowhand at a farm near Blackpool.

He moved on to a succession of factory jobs in Chester, Sheffield, Barnsley and Liverpool. He managed to find time to cycle down England past Didcot.

His National Service took him to Egypt. He complained that he never got to see the pyramids.

Like his father, Roy was a Communist - and a member of the Young Communist League. Which resulted in trips to Moscow for the World Youth Festival in 1957 and also to Prague. Long train journeys right through the middle of the Cold War.

But it wasn't all politics and travel. Roy was at a dance in Liverpool. He asked a tall blonde called Audrey to dance. Roy, it has to be admitted, was not tall. Audrey's friend thought that Roy was being "ambitious".

Roy then asked Audrey's friend to dance. She was more his height. Her name was Beryl.

What Roy lacked in stature he more than made up for as a dancer. He was good. This was the era of the Ballroom Dance. Beryl says that Roy would put in his own moves. You followed where he led.

One thing lead to another – and Roy proposed to Beryl. But, he said, he had a confession to make first....

He was in the Communist Party.

Beryl, whose imagination had already run riot, was relieved. "Is that all?" she said.

They were married in Crosby in 1963. They were both keen cyclists, although for a time Roy had a motorcycle and sidecar. They were both Internationalist in outlook. They honeymooned in Rimini – because Beryl loved Italy. At the house in Didcot there's still a shelf of the colourful glasses she bought on that honeymoon. En route Roy found time to visit the local Communist party offices in Bologna.

Roy started work at Cowley Road in Oxford on the assembly line. It would probably have been Morris Motors in those days. He was a member of both the Factory and City branches of The Communist Party and became Treasurer for the Didcot branch of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.

The family home was by now in Didcot. Roy would cycle to and from work every day – about 24 miles a day. He never owned a car. He'd take a bus if the weather was particularly bad – or if he had a Union meeting in the evening.

He was a hard worker – both at Cowley Road and in Didcot. He helped start the Athletics Club in Didcot – he was a middle distance runner himself. He started a Badminton Club. He helped start the Swimming Club. And revived the Cycling Club.

Jonathan was born in 1964 and Sylvia in 1965. About the time the family moved to Icknield Close.

When the children were small the family would go on walking holidays. Later on there were cycling holidays. The Davidson family favoured the Celtic fringe and Youth Hostels.

Beryl remembers the majestic Scottish mountains. Steep roads that she would walk up rather than try and ride up. Roy would whizz down the other side. Beryl preferred the less risky process of walking down.

Most holidays were in the UK.

There was the exception of the Progressive Tours trip to Bulgaria in the 70s. The children's first time on a plane. The family remember lots of drunken Russians, visits to a collective farm, natural yoghurt – and ballroom dancing – which seriously embarrassed Jonathan and Sylvia. A holiday that was carefully documented by Roy and his cine camera.

By the time the children were in their mid-teens Beryl and Roy would leave them home alone when they went on holiday. This isn't as outrageous as it sounds. The children were trusted to do the right thing – except when it came to small things. Jonathan was given the key to the front door when he was twelve. Sylvia got her key when she was ten – worn on a string around her neck for safety.

Roy loved meeting people, especially outside the UK. He never let his lack of languages stop him being sociable.

When Roy and Beryl were cycling in the Dordogne, for instance, they would always manage to get invited in for a drink or a meal by locals. And they responded in kind. Roy was always bringing strangers home. The more foreign the better. Like the poor man who had travelled to Didcot to spend Christmas with friends – only to discover they were away on holiday. He had Christmas at the Davidsons instead.

Roy would never pass a fellow cyclist in trouble. He'd always stop to help. And as he rode he'd sing at the top of his voice. More effective than any bell. And way more embarrassing for your children.

In due course both children grew up and left home – giving Beryl and Roy more space and time to themselves. Dancing was still a favourite – though they shifted from Ballroom Dancing to Folk Dancing. Towersy Folk Festival was an annual event for them.

Cycling remained important. The couple cycled from Land's End to John o'Groats. Beryl says they didn't rush it like some people. They took a leisurely three weeks to complete the ride. Which used up all three weeks of Roy's annual holidays in one go.

In the late 1980s Roy was offered redundancy. He took it.

Now he had time. Time to read. He was a fanatical reader – two or three books a week – histories and biographies. He wasn't very interested in fiction.

His bookshelves are stuffed with Lenin, Stalin, Marx, Engels – and the complete works of Shakespeare. For a man who had spent his all too brief schooldays truanting he was determined to make up for lost time – especially culturally. Roy and Beryl went to the ballet and to the theatre. His extensive record collection was mainly classical.

Though he and Beryl didn't neglect the other parts of their life. Greenham Common. Upper Heyford. CND marches in London. Friends remember that Roy always turned up – and was never afraid to approach strangers with a leaflet.

Part of Roy's daily routine was to check that the newsagent was suitably stocked with the Morning Star – copies of which Roy would deliver to those in Didcot he thought needed one.

In other words, Roy actively tried to make the world a better and fairer place. He liked Didcot because it was a friendly working class town. A town where he was well known.

Roy was visiting the opticians last year. Another customer recognised him, stood up and shook him by the hand.

But then every town should have an 80-year-old member of the Young Communist League.

As he became older he mellowed a little. A life long atheist he was happy to attend Quaker meetings with Beryl. His children do wonder how he coped with the silences though.

Jonathan thinks that Roy should have ideally lived in a tiny northern Italian town, constantly battling with the Catholic priest – like Don Camillo but with more cycling and country dancing.

And Roy could still surprise. Jonathan discovered Roy, well into his seventies, teaching the grandchildren how to skip. By skipping.

Then came the accident. 14 years ago. It was a slow recovery. Which was not good for a proud man like Roy. The hospital announced that they were confiscating Roy's walking stick because he was using it to threaten them because they wouldn't let him go home.

Roy's Morning Star paper round got smaller. But he did not complain.

As the world order changed Roy turned his attentions to family history – and discovered a new tribe – the Clan Davidson of Aberdeenshire. He got himself a kilt and a sporran and a *skean dhu* – and loved to show it off. The clan motto – “wisely if sincerely”.

We're going to end this tribute with some words from Jonathan.

JONATHAN:

As we have heard, my Dad had a more various life than he could ever have imagined when he first left Liverpool. Of course a list of things done is one thing but how one moves through the world is also important. My Dad could be extraordinarily generous and warm-hearted and also frustratingly contrary and cantankerous. He loved people but had a funny way of showing it. He had a short temper at times but wouldn't hurt a fly and his apologies were genuine. I think it is fair to say that the British Diplomatic Service didn't unduly miss him. Although perhaps MI5 will. They had a file on him – still do - and frankly my Dad's behaviour must have caused them some confusion. For an enemy of the state he seemed strangely keen on starting badminton clubs, keeping our local swimming pool open and country dancing. Oh, and world peace. That's probably what they didn't like.

When my sister and I were growing up he was an absolute tartar about shoelaces not being undone properly or a dinner dawdled over but he rarely if ever tried to tell us what to do when it came to our lives and fortunes. If I'd said I was joining the Young Conservatives and hoped to be a Hedge Fund Manager, I think he would have said, as long as you know what you are doing. I didn't join and neither did my sister and we don't manage hedges – though we are keen on nature - in fact we find ourselves on the kind of journeys my dad would have taken had things been very different. In fact, I learned a lot from my Dad. Always stop to help a fellow cyclist, dancing is good, singing too, making people laugh can save the day. Be kind and courteous to strangers. And we never doubted his love for my mum or her's for him. Or his love for us. In that as in everything, he was committed.

In fact, many of my Dad's qualities are ones we'd like to have. When we went walking in the countryside he'd collect rubbish in a plastic bag. It was excruciatingly embarrassing for me and my sister, but now I know this was the right thing to do. I find myself doing the same. And the daily energy he put into his politics with no hope of personal gain or even much anticipation of progress, well, he puts most contemporary politicians in the shade. Those who lord it over us today can only dream of being as honestly committed as my Dad.

Sometimes – often - he upset people, said the wrong things, overstayed his welcome. But over the years I think he got a certain respect for his labours. The Party. The Union, The Peace Group. The Clubs and Societies. Comrade Roy. Brother Roy. Roy Davidson on his bike. Roy Davidson in his kilt. Always the first to get up and dance. “Take me as you find me”, he'd say. Easier said than done sometimes. He spent most of his life as a factory worker. But wasn't always great. But he had passion for life. And he believed in a better future. For all of us. And taken all in all, he was a good man.

My daughter, Mollie, has kindly agreed to read out a piece I wrote about my Dad twenty years ago.

MOLLIE:

Sketch of my Father

I see you at a distance, complete,
your compact figure wheeling a bike,
one slight hand only on the handlebars,
or else pulling the pedals up the hill,
fighting the gradient. You are not angry
but some people have unnerved or even
disappointed you and now the days
are oddly shaped, the days fall over
their many selves to bring you back
to a Welsh field in wartime
and your child-self singing as you hacked
at bracken or watched the cows home.
You had a valley and a small mountain
to climb. You had a boy's lifetime.

QUIET REFLECTION

We're coming to the end of this celebration of Roy's life. But before we do we're going to pause for a moment of reflection. A chance for you to digest all you've heard. A chance for you to recall your own memories of him. A chance, if you wish, to pray silently.

Cantus in Memoriam - Benjamin Britten - Arvo Pärt

COMMITTAL

Just as we welcome a child into our lives we must say goodbye to those who leave us. This celebration of Roy's life is complete. It's time to say farewell to him. This may be difficult but it is important. I hope the memories we've talked about here may give you some comfort.

FINAL FAREWELL

Our atoms and molecules come from the earth;
Are ordered by ancestry;
Are fired into life by union;
Are sustained by the earth and powered by the sun;
And return to the earth when life ends.

John Stuffin

Roy Frederick Davidson. Son of Frederick and Edith. Brother to Rosalie and Rita. Husband to Beryl. Father of Jonathan and Sylvia. Grandfather to Frederick, Mollie, Rose and Finlay.

We commit your body to be cremated. Rest in the hearts and minds of all you love and all who love you.

CLOSING WORDS

We've celebrated Roy's life. We've said our goodbyes. But we have our memories. And the rest of our lives to remember.

If you want to share those memories – or just some refreshment – you're warmly invited to join the family at St Ethelwold's House in Abingdon. You'll find details in your order of service.

As you leave you'll see that you can make a donation in Roy's memory to The Woodland Trust, to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and to the People's Printing Press Society. Again you'll find details in your order of service.

Please take good care of yourselves and each other.

Thank you for coming.

EXIT

Peer Gynt, Suite No. 1, Op. 46: Morning – Edvard Grieg