

A celebration of life

Arthur Gribben

22nd June 1933 – 10th January 2020

28th January 2020 Cromer Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Arthur was born on 22 June 1933, in Redruth in Cornwall, to Arthur John Gribben and Elsie May Hugo – a younger brother for Irene, and, two years later, an older brother for Jack. His family was very musical, and he often remembered being about ten years' old with all his family and friends playing a variety of instruments and entertaining the American troops in Plymouth. Arthur played an accordion, which was so heavy it had to be carried by his mother. Arthur was able to play by memory, and last month he was still playing the keyboard entertaining many of his family with Christmas carols.

Arthur joined the RAF in 1951. After basic training, he was sent to Tripoli for three years, then a brief spell in England, and then two years in Egypt. When posted to Cyprus he decided he didn't want to get shot, so made the decision to leave the RAF. He was sent back to England, where he immediately joined up again.

During his three years at Innsworth in Gloucester, daughter Amanda was born, soon to be followed by David whilst posted in Germany, then Peter when stationed at RAF Finningley in Doncaster. Postings to Bahrain and St Mawgan in Cornwall followed, then, in 1969, to Singapore.

Arthur loved his time in Singapore with Amanda, David, and Peter, and started a swimming club for all the children at the Changi base. David remembers a swimming gala for Changi versus Tengah, but, just before the teams started competing, a massive lightning strike meant everyone was thrown out of the pool.

Following a posting to Boscombe Down in 1973, Arthur arrived at RAF Coltishall with Amanda, David, and Peter, and immediately started up swimming lessons including one for Ladies Only. Arthur met Jean in 1974, teaching her to swim, and soon Jean, with her daughters, Susan and Sally, squeezed into Arthur's three-bedroom house to live with him, Amanda, David, Peter, their dog, and their budgie. They were soon given a four-bedroom house nearby, and all the belongings were carried down the road, including the coal, using Susan's dolly's pram, whose wheels never worked properly again.

With Arthur at the helm, RAF Coltishall swimming pool became central to family life. He was allowed time off work a few afternoons a week to take local schools for swimming lessons, but the rest was voluntary. Most evenings and Saturdays were spent teaching children and adults from the wider community how to swim or encouraging their love of swimming, supported by Jean as Treasurer/Secretary, and David, Susan, and Sally, who became qualified Lifeguards. The Puffin Club, signified by a puffin bird, was actually named after Arthur said his swimming pupils came out of the pool puffin'. Winners of the galas that were held were awarded with Jean's mum and dad's golf trophies.

In 1978 Arthur received a CO's commendation for all his community work, and there have been many occasions where he has been stopped in the street by members of the public remembering him teaching them to swim as children. He continued as a lifeguard until he was sixty-eight.

Another love of the family was cycling – essential to get anywhere when you didn't have a car. Best of all was the tandem, with Arthur always at the front. On an outing, the rest of the family would take turns to sit at the back, where they could stick their legs out to rest while Arthur carried on peddling.

Arthur had a great love of outdoors and nature, and the whole family spent a great deal of time walking around and exploring the local area whatever the weather. When the snow came Arthur would pull the children on the sledge, one year when RAF Coltishall was cut off, even to the local village shop across the tops of buried cars to buy milk and bread.

Laura was born to Arthur and Jean in 1980, just before Arthur retired from the RAF, when the family moved to North Walsham, where she, too, remembers being pulled along by sledge in the snow into

town. Of course Arthur taught her to swim, and she also went on to become a lifeguard. He lost the bet he made with her that she would only last two weeks in the RAF, which she joined in 2000, and she went on to swim for the RAF. He was very proud of all the children.

When Arthur retired in 1982, he recalled his RAF career as “a thirty-one year holiday”.

From a teenager, Arthur was a keen stamp collector, and, in 1976, he was presented to Princess Margaret, when he proudly showed off his collection from all over the world. He also collected huge quantities of stamps from numerous sources that he sorted and donated to be sold, with profits being donated to the RNLI. A task he was still performing earlier this month. Many years ago, he was awarded a certificate from the RNLI in recognition of the valuable contribution he had made.

Sea-fishing was another great love, and much time was spent on the Norfolk coast, including Cromer, where family days out also included bait-digging and shrimp-fishing. In the early days, as a holiday, Arthur and Jean would also go off on the tandem, camping on the beach, with Jean cooking his catch on the camping stove for dinner – such fun sadly no longer allowed. Later, Laura would accompany him, sleeping in a tent, while Arthur did his night fishing.

With a little more money and time to spend, Arthur and Jean developed a taste for foreign holidays, and particularly ones near the sea, taking Laura with them in her younger days, where they enjoyed swimming and fishing. He loved to fish the fjords of Norway, where son Peter lived, and loved nothing better than spending hours on a boat with David and Peter, giving the proceeds of the day to all Peter’s neighbours. He really did catch some large fish; there are photos to prove it.

His love of outdoors extended not just to his own garden, but his neighbours’ as well. Brenda next door gave him free rein in hers; luckily the fence was kept, otherwise hers would have become his own garden extension. He produced hundreds of hanging baskets over the years for many businesses, growing many plants from plugs, but also having a natural ability to take cuttings. Many people, especially his children, were very fortunate to have him pass on the excess of plants he grew, particularly the agapanthus he grew from seed. Given the opportunity he would do all the hard work needed to plant them for you. Laura particularly also remembers his fondness for garden gnomes, as she had to repaint them all for him.

In recent years, Arthur and Jean have spent many occasions staying at Laura’s, and Arthur could be found equally happy walking to the shop for his newspaper, with Brynley pushing his pink Peppa Pig pushchair, or on the floor playing with Seren. After they’d left, however, there would always be a few stray stamps to find.

Arthur’s illness came as a great shock to him and his family. The last year was difficult for this man, who had lived a busy and active life, used to doing so much for other people. He did not accept the advice to slow down easily, and disagreed strongly that he was no longer allowed to do the garden or chop wood. Nevertheless, Arthur lived with his illness, enjoying his life as best he could. Very recently he enjoyed a trip to Great Yarmouth, where he went to his favourite place to eat – The Alexandra – and ate a plate of spaghetti bolognese.

Arthur will be fondly remembered by all who knew him as a generous man, always willing to help out if possible. Funny and kind-hearted with his wayward eyebrows kept under control by Jean; his family especially will miss him greatly.

Arthur was an amazing Husband, Dad, Grandad, Great-Grandad, Brother, and Uncle – the best his family could have wished for. Arthur was a special man, who meant so much to his family. The following poem has been chosen with that in mind.

As We Look Back by Clare Jones

As we look back over time
We find ourselves wondering
Did we remember to thank you enough
For all you have done for us?
For all the times you were by our sides
To help and support us
To celebrate our successes
To understand our problems
And accept our defeats?
Or for teaching us by your example,
The value of hard work, good judgement,
Courage and integrity?
We wonder if we ever thanked you
For the sacrifices you made.
To let us have the very best?
And for the simple things
Like laughter, smiles and times we shared?
If we have forgotten to show our
Gratitude enough for all the things you did,
We're thanking you now.
And we are hoping you knew all along,
How much you meant to us.