

# A celebration of life

# Gordon Claridge

23 January 1932 – 3 May 2021

3-4pm, Wednesday 2 June 2021  
North Oxfordshire Crematorium



*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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## Remembering Gordon

*My name is Ken Clark.*

*I first met Gordon in my late twenties. I am now 85, making our relationship of some 56 years.*

*Gordon is no longer with us and this leaves a large hole in my life.*

*I find it interesting to gain an insight into the life of a person we know so well, of their life with others in areas of their life we are not exposed to or involved with. I first met Gordon shortly after leaving university as a mature student in Glasgow where he was running the Post Graduate Diploma Course in Clinical Psychology. Our personalities and approaches to life appeared to have blended and I almost immediately became involved in his research. My background in electronics and engineering appeared to be of some help. The research over the years was very varied involving psychophysiology, brain wave studies, eye movement, twin research, many studies involving patients ~ plus others.*

*Our time there was not just research, but included a good varied social life, involving tennis with colleagues in the courts of the hospital, very competitive table tennis in the patients' leisure centre, photography, including developing colour printing in the psychological laboratory together with the lights out and just using a very low-level red light. We were pioneers in this field. There were many trips to leading academics, conferences involving a fair degree of social life ... an unusual example of Gordon's unconventionality was our group visit to the BPS conference at Queens University Belfast. On the second day Gordon suggested that we could do something more interesting and explore some of Southern Ireland, which we did using our two cars. It was a great event.*

*After five years in Glasgow I left, got married and moved to a post in a hospital near Wallingford called Fair Mile Hospital. Around three years later Gordon obtained a position at Magdalen College in Oxford, and one day I was sitting in my office when there was a knock on the door and in walked Gordon. I was flabbergasted. After some social conversation etc this was the beginning of our second phase of research. This initially started at Magdalen College and the Psychology Department in South Parks Road. Later this was continued at a psychology laboratory set up at Fair Mile Hospital. After Gordon's retirement research was continued for years at his home in North Oxford.*

*Life was never just research though. At Fair Mile it was first coffee, discussions, getting our bikes out of our cars and cycling back and forth to a pub, then more coffee before the research. On a few occasions Gordon would join me in seeing patients that would be of interest to him. Research at Gordon's home was coffee first and then chats and discussions*

*in the living room. At around midday it was tennis for thirty to forty minutes in the garden with two very competitive players, followed by a stroll to The Plough for our egg and chips lunch, and after returning it was a coffee before afternoon research.*

*Our social life involved cycling trips, for example starting off along the uneven Oxford Canal on one trip, and on one occasion a trip of nearly 45 miles before we found an egg and chips pub. Our social trips included the arts e.g. the Tate Gallery with friends met there, the Banksy Exhibition in Bristol with friends met there and then galleries in London by patients. We had non-art trips to exhibitions like car museums, photographic exhibitions, unrelated exhibitions for example on propaganda and one to Burton on the Water with female academic colleagues met there, who enjoyed walking through the streams to the car museum there where my first car, a Morris Minor Coupe, left hand drive, split-screen side valve was an exhibit there.*

*With Gordon's Smart car we twice entered the London to Brighton rally. I have always regretted at Brighton Pier fun fair not proposing that we have a go on the dodgems. I'm sure he would have. We were members of the Phoenix Cinema in Walton Street where we saw many varied films each one followed by a discussion in the café opposite.*

*Gordon would also visit our home in Blewbury where we had home cinema with a large screen. Films varied widely but on occasions he requested films that Jemima had suggested, which I must say were particularly interesting. On one occasion we drove to near Tilbury to buy a used tricycle which unfortunately later proved to be unsuitable.*

*We had meals in Oxford twice a year with Ian Kennedy who had known us both over an equally long period. We had conferences abroad to France, Switzerland and Estonia. In Estonia we stayed on after the conference for a tour of Tartu, an old, large and interesting city where the conference had been held.*

*I shall always miss those long near philosophical discussions on so many varied areas sometimes lasting for quite long periods. I learned more about psychology from Gordon than any other individual. Gordon has been a person in my life I will always treasure. He brought to me knowledge, research, friendship and a rich social life.*

*Thank you so much Gordon.*

*Good Afternoon. I am Rashmi Shankar (Clinical Psychologist) and my association with Gordon began a few decades ago, when I applied to the Oxford Experimental Psychology Department for my doctoral research. I wish to say 'thank you' to his family for including me today, to be able to say farewell through this tribute.*

*I first met Gordon when he interviewed me. In an interesting chronology, the date of the interview was 2 June 1980. I expected adversarial questioning on my MA dissertation. Instead, there was a discussion about the method and data analysis. I remember Gordon's reflective analysis and an openness to information from a cross-cultural perspective. I was fortunate to join his research group as a graduate student. The topic that I had chosen was then not commonly researched in Britain – Borderline Personality Disorder.*

*When more than a few months of strife followed due to challenges in data-collection, Gordon remained unperturbed and maintained a supportive, measured stance encouraging all concerned to keep focused on solutions in the cause of science. Many creases during meetings with hospital bureaucracy were smoothed out with his rather pragmatic approach coupled with a wry humour. Of course, in tandem, a rigorous critique was received on any written work that was submitted for his attention.*

*A lasting memory from that time is Gordon's commitment to supporting original research ideas. The 'Journal Club' presentations where speakers were invited to share a piece of original research on clinical topics are still spoken about. Some people here today will remember these. The stimulating discussions that followed helped to create momentum when one's own research seemed to flounder!*

*Through 40 years, I saw the different stages of his search for evidence that tested out the idea that experiences related to psychosis could be understood as personality traits. Working with his graduate students, complex experiments were set up, for instance from psychophysiology, cognitive studies, neuropsychology and questionnaire measurement.*

*Due to this major research effort, with the help of the Participants and Service Users, internationally, clinicians and researchers are now familiar with the theory and construct of 'schizotypy' and with a 4-scale questionnaire (the Oxford-Liverpool Inventory of Feelings and Experiences or the O-LIFE) that can be used to measure it. Gordon and his group tried to understand how some personality traits could become symptoms of psychosis. This was a rather novel approach.*

*In a recent line of research, Gordon and his co-researchers showed that people who scored high on schizotypy were better on certain tasks and that they could be more creative. By testing actors and comedians, intersections were shown between creativity, psychosis and personality.*

*A testament to his scholarship and to empirical rigour, the rich legacy of his books and papers extends the psychological understanding of mental health experiences.*

*Gordon maintained constancy of contact until the end. Whenever it was possible, he made time for informed conversations on a range of topics and especially on the applications of psychological knowledge within the clinical domain. A few weeks before the end came, we spoke at length about his career and his work. I commented on his dedicated effort and asked him what drove him to focus on psychosis. In his inimitable way, he replied, "I did not accept the dopamine hypothesis!"*

*Gordon Claridge, Clinical Psychologist, Experimental Psychologist, Emeritus Professor, thank you for your hard work and farewell!*

Before we hear more about Gordon's life, let's have some music. This is one of the singer-songwriters whose work he enjoyed: Regina Spektor with *The Light*.

### **Gordon's life**

Gordon was born on 23 January 1932 to parents Bertha and Sydney, who lived in Walsall in the West Midlands. His father was a saddlers' toolmaker, and Gordon had an older sister, Beryl.

What was the world like back then? China and Japan were at war. In Australia, the Sydney Harbour Bridge was about to open. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was published the following week, and cinemagoers were enjoying the first of the *Tarzan* films.

As a young child, Gordon was quiet and introspective – a trait reinforced by him spending three months in an isolation ward when he caught diphtheria at the age of six. He was traumatised by the sight of his parents burning his favourite toy duck and other possessions in an effort to contain the disease. Upset too by the nurses who just shouted at him for being lazy when he could no longer walk after such a long time in bed.

Gordon continued to be a loner, an outsider – he'd pretend to be a spy during the suspicious days of the Second World War by picking on an unsuspecting stranger and tailing them around Walsall – hopping on and off buses to track their movements.

A devout but hopefully well-meaning aunt constantly implored him to be more like another local boy they both knew from church. Unsurprisingly, Gordon developed an intense dislike for and ill-feeling towards this supposedly golden child – but was then wracked by guilt when he suddenly died. Gordon worried that his negative thoughts had somehow contributed to the boy's death (also from diphtheria).

Maybe these early life experiences influenced Gordon's decision to study Psychology at London's University College, as did his National Service, during which he worked at a military mental hospital.

As a PhD student, he came under the influence of his great academic mentor Hans Eysenck, with whom he continued to work as a research assistant and clinical psychologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Southampton.

Gordon had met his first wife, June, while he was in London. She'd worked at the Harrods department store in bustling Knightsbridge, and the move to the south coast didn't suit her.

So while Iain was born in Southampton in 1960, within a couple of years they relocated to Bristol, where Gordon split his time between a hospital role and part-time lecturing at the city's university. He and June separated shortly before the birth of Paul and Andrew in 1963.

The following year, Gordon was on the move again – up to Glasgow, where he ran the university's clinical psychology course. And it was here that he met his second wife, Rosemary, to whom David was born in 1971 and Emma two years later.

Through this diversity of experience, Gordon's academic stock steadily rose, so for his next job move he had the choice between going to work in Denmark or taking up a lecturer position in the Department of Abnormal Psychology and as a Fellow of Magdalen College here in Oxford.

The prestige and advantages of Oxford won out – bringing the family to live in Davenant Road in 1974; the house where Gordon spent most of the rest of his life.

His career and standing continued to develop – he progressed to become Professor Claridge. Yet even as he became immersed in the ways of this ancient university, he continued to see himself as somehow apart from it.

Gordon often proudly told how he once gave an entire day's lectures and tutorials wearing a bright yellow Levi's sweatshirt conspicuously (and allegedly accidentally) back-to-front. He felt that the lack of reaction to this from any of his colleagues or students simply confirmed the stuffy, elitist and etiquette-obsessed atmosphere.

He was sure that while everyone was too polite to say anything directly to him, they were all tutting disapprovingly about such slovenliness behind his back. Yet at the same time, the incident fuelled his own sense of being an endearing Oxford oddball.

Whatever Gordon's misgivings about life at Oxford, it certainly opened doors for him – to membership of the British Psychological Society, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and to becoming President of the International Society for the Study of Individual Differences.

He also became an occasional media spokesperson on his specialist areas of expertise – appearing on Radio 4's *Today* programme and being filmed for a documentary about mental illness among comedians.

Gordon devoted himself to his studies, research and teaching – working for as long as he was able and producing a significant body of papers, writings and lasting collaborations. The photo on the front of the order of service comes from the cover of a selection of his work: *Psychopathology and Personality Dimensions*.

At home and in person as a husband, father and later grandfather, Gordon gets a more mixed report. Iain, you told me about annual summer holidays in Scotland and Ireland, and introducing girlfriends to your father, all of whom were somehow captivated by his intellectual appeal. As an adult, he was as much a mate to you as a father.

And David, you said that as a child and young adult you thought Gordon was the 'cool' parent. He was into cars, computers, films and literature; relaxed about smoking, drinking or anything else young people might want to get up to.

But I know you've later come to see that parenting is also about being a positive role model, having boundaries and supporting one's partner or spouse. So it's understandable that Gordon seemed to come up short on these fronts.

Emma – you felt that Gordon was good for you: always on your wavelength, rarely disciplining you and only ever shouting at you once (I neglected to ask what for...). He wasn't a typical father you said, but a very positive person in your life.

You'd play endless board games, badminton and other outdoor games together, and he was always the one to help with homework and take an interest in what you were doing.

Into your adulthood, Gordon was supportive and involved – you had long, hilarious phone calls (right up until the day before he died) and saw each other often.

Jemima – you're going to give us your take on Gordon in a while. The 'Grampy' version of Gordon was described to me as being like a cat: aloof and apparently indifferent to children climbing all over him.

Like a cat, he could also get grumpy when disturbed, but he was an important presence at all sorts of family events, outings, birthdays and Christmas. Sometimes grimacing and complaining about the noise and hyperactivity going on around him, but loving it really.

Always unorthodox and determined to follow his own path, Gordon took little interest in many of the things that delight others. Although he was keen on films, drawing and modern literature, he wasn't much bothered about other Arts.

Similarly gardening (apart from a brief obsession with growing a black rose for Jemima), travel (aside from occasional conferences overseas and some trips to First and Second World War battlefields in France and Belgium) and food.

Excepting his attempts to make a favourite lamb casserole and his own ice cream, I understand that Gordon was a famously inept and limited cook – part of a wider physical, clumsy awkwardness that earned him the family nickname ‘Mr Frumble’.

The things that gave him most pleasure throughout his life were cars – including a series of unusual and sometimes inappropriate coupé cars, which he could latterly barely get in and out of – and his work. He continued writing and teaching way past his official retirement.

In his politics, Gordon was forthrightly left wing – an avowed Communist in his younger days; convinced and rather pleased to think that MI5 must hold a thick file about him.

In the 1980s he jokingly (?) conceived a plot to shoot Margaret Thatcher from the top of Magdalen College tower, when she visited Oxford.

By the end of his life, he’d softened a bit – very much a Corbynista, but tactically voting Liberal Democrat; a bit more in tune with his laissez faire instincts perhaps.

Gordon remained acutely aware of social and political issues – an avid reader of *Private Eye* right up until his sight failed him in his last few months. And he also became committed to environmental causes. He wished for a more equal society and hoped that our species would find ways to slow or reverse the damage we’ve inflicted on the Earth.

Until a couple of years ago, Gordon enjoyed generally good health, although his later immobility was a difficult reminder of his childhood illness. Whatever his calendar age, he was young at heart and always anxious to be independent.

With Emma’s help he staged a break-out from the residential home where he briefly stayed to convalesce – cheerfully whisked away up the road in a wonky-wheeled, heavy-duty wheelchair still in his pyjamas!

Iain – you told me that what summed up Gordon best for you was his answerphone recording.

It said: *“Hello, this is the voice of Gordon Claridge. The rest of me is not here at the moment, so please leave a message.”*

Well, today is about all of our messages for and memories of Gordon. So we’ll think about those while we have another piece of music.

This is Gary Jules, with the appropriately titled *Mad World*.



## **Grampy Gordon**

Jemima – time for you to tell us more about your grandfather.

*When you lose everything you have to start somewhere to rebuild it all.*

*The thing with how I see it*

*And the thing with people, and pain, and grievance, and death, and love is that the most and the worst we can say is 'I'm sorry'*

*As my grandmother said, 'WHO CARES IF YOU ARE SORRY, well meaning stranger, though will all due respect you didn't even know the person who died You cannot bring them back'*

*No one can*

*Nobody has that ability*

*As much as we may wish for it*

*I cried with laughter and laughed with tears because I rejoiced the peace and clarity to be able to do both.*

*I don't know if he'd approve*

*Although I think a part of him would collude*

*He was good at that; colluding*

*Being the best mate, the companion, the confidant To desperate people in the darkest of times In the bleakest crow caw of loneliness Those friendships twisted and turned and ebbed and flowed with the tide of the Ganges And then flung themselves out, full throttle, with the force and vigour of a 'that's gonna earn him a speeding ticket' style zoom down the Woodstock road into the crashing joy of the light He was a wonderful friend to many people*

*I knew Gordon in the way that people convince themselves they know others.*

*As, after all, there is no way of knowing what is in or what is out of character when comprehending the multifaceted complexity each and every one of us holds inside.*

*'Character' simply refers to the stories we tell each other about one another.*

*I knew the MULTITUDE of characters Gordon was very very briefly.*

*I knew him as a grandfather*

*As a best friend*

*As an authority of advice*

*An academic*

*An enemy*

*An idol*

*A menace*

*An artist and photographer*

*A joker*

*A supporter of equality*

*A brain and heart and soul*

*A father*

*A bloke*

*A liked mind*

*A person really. We're all people despite the layers we wear.*

*Though as Marlon Brando said*

*'People only have so many faces in their pockets'*

*Gordon had a million*

*Potentially a trillion*

*Nobody knew him like another person did He was like a smashed mirror A mirror has a thousand faces A thousand shards A thousand reflections*

*Reflecting things right back at you*

*Bouncing things right back at you*

*Bouncing YOU right back at you*

*Whoever you may be*

*Whoever you may need is whoever you did see*

*That was how it was with Gordon*

*At least in my experience*

*But then, with a broken mirror, someone sweeps it up*

*I knew Gordon as a snippet of each face A short introductory video to each chapter of his  
being I'm 19 He died at 89*

*We bonded over our near 70 year age difference It was a topic of communion among us*

*A loved one has 1000 faces  
We can never love them all  
But we can damn well love a lot of them*

*Dear Gordon,  
If you are listening  
I do not know how I will now miss you  
I do not know what shape that will form I don't know how I will at all I can never understand  
you As my age is very small And my mind is very wide and sprawling and sometimes prone  
to falsehoods Or so I am told*

*I really did love you  
As I loved no one else*

*And in this time of wills and funerals and buying of suits and arranging who will take home  
the pot of charred up churned up ashes*

*I bet you'd be thinking 'oh for GOD's SAKE!!! Just get on with it'*

*Sort of the same way I am actually  
The 'bloody hell' 'Jesus Christ' attitude of my mum*

*I wish I could tell you  
We're all saying that  
Amongst all this conundrum  
We're thinking 'I'll just go and tell Gordon'*

*How do we sum up one person...?*

*I really don't know*

*I think Love is life itself  
Or at least it should be  
And Time will tell*

*Time ticks away with the arrogance of a man who never felt the ground beneath his feet and  
never wondered what inhabited the sky above him*

*Time is currency  
I hope there will be enough, currently, to occupy us And to see us into the future Inevitably,  
without our Gordon*

*I think about how  
How you never reached the Plough's egg & chip door that final time with Ken  
Because your leg was bad  
Wounds akin to 3rd degree burns  
And then all of that led up to now  
As time often does  
but I suppose it doesn't matter the way that people often say that things don't matter  
because you'd both been there a damn lot of times As if that'll make things any more  
complacent to deal with*

*We have a whole host of good memories every single one of us so let's get the hell on with  
the wake*

*Wake up, Gordon, you might even enjoy it*

*Doubt it though, you were never much a bloke for parties Which is why we're not having one  
Perhaps have a solitary gin instead*

*I mean, after all, you were the man who cancelled his own 80th birthday party*

*I'll never forget you  
It'd be impossible to forget someone as iconic as you.*