

# A celebration of life

# ROBIN NEIL HANNAY

23<sup>rd</sup> November 1933 – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021

4.00pm 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 at The Vale Crematorium, Pershore

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

## Mike

On behalf of the family and in particular my mother, I would like to thank everyone who has joined us today, both in person and online, to celebrate the life of Robin Neil Hannay, my father.

Dad had a full and long life, living well beyond the traditional three-score-years-and- ten, even managing to beat the life expectancy of most men born in the 1930s.

I can only put this down to two important factors:

- Firstly, his diet, and;
- Secondly, his complete lack, and indeed total avoidance, of all forms of physical

exercise.

Dad's preferred diet was one based on the products of Tate & Lyle. One could even say he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth – for those of you who remember the adverts!

My mum and his mum both supported Dad in this approach to a healthy lifestyle, providing Dad with some of the best baking to be found in the Midlands. Complementing his consumption of baked goods was tea. His perfect cup of tea was barely tanned, tepid with copious amounts of milk and four sugars.

This high level of refined sugar consumption seemed pretty unhealthy in the '70s when there was no such thing as a healthy diet, but by the turn of the century Dad's diet was considered a significant health risk. In response, he dramatically modified his behaviour, adding in low-fat yoghurts between the rounds of cake and chocolate.

Dad's diet peaked on 19th May 1990, the day Sarah and I got married. At the end of the meal, and purely in order to help out the catering staff's confusion over an excess of puddings, he cleared up all remaining bowls of raspberry pavlova.

Many would consider this approach to diet sub-optimal, but perhaps we should reconsider dietary doctrines, as Dad didn't succumb to diabetes. He was in many ways a modern medical miracle.

Dad was never known as an athlete and barely comprehended the attraction of sport. But he supported Claire and I in whatever sporting activities we undertook. We could always rely on Dad to take us to and collect us from sporting events. This was often followed by a visit to the Chip Shop – the 1980's version of post-match nutritional supplements.

Even at school – Bemrose Grammar School in Derby – Dad studiously avoided all interactions with sport, preferring to spend games lessons 'in detention' in the library. Little did the teachers dishing out the punishment realise that this was Dad's strategic aim, as it gave him the opportunity to monitor the Derby Corporation bus fleet, and occasionally see a new chassis from Guy Motors travelling down the A38 to coach builders in Loughborough and Leeds.

This was not a sudden interest, but one that had developed at a much earlier age while living with my Aunties Pam and Wizz at their parents' house on Rykneld Road in Derby. Before he was tall enough to look over the gates Dad would climb up as buses passed, eventually explaining the different makes and models – much to the surprise of my grandparents.

An interest (or rather an obsession) with lorries and buses seems an unlikely attribute to help win friends and influence people, but Dad was a good friend. At school he made friends with Peter

Bridge, and the two of them would remain friends for the rest of their lives – sharing a love of engineering and a wicked sense of humour.

Dad decided that engineering was going to be his future, and with the support of his father he applied for and got a student engineering apprenticeship at Guy Motors in Wolverhampton. This meant a move away from home in 'Derbados' – the tropical paradise formerly known as Derby!

As a student engineer, Dad had a ball and a lapel badge. At weekends he travelled home, but not to be with the family. Instead he preferred to be 'on the buses' with another lifelong friend, Gordon Hulley.

I don't think Dad could have realised how long his association with Guys would last and how many parts of his life were going to be affected by his choice of careers.

Not only did he produce numerous articles and publish four books on Guy Motors, the last of which was completed in his eighties, but he would meet a lifelong friend, Uncle Ian, and be introduced to his wife. All this thanks to a small, Wolverhampton-based manufacturer of lorries and buses.

Mum and Dad got married in August 1960. This was not because of any great desire to have a summer wedding, but to avoid any chance of a clash with the Autumn Commercial Motorshow – an annual event Dad attended for over sixty years.

Their first house was in Fordhouses, Wolverhampton, before moving to Wheaton Aston where they lived next door to Auntie Jan and Uncle Ian. In March 1966, I arrived on the scene and a couple of years later we moved up to Cheshire following Dad's promotion with AEC. In 1970 our family was complete with the arrival of my sister, Claire.

Many men curb their hobbies upon the arrival of children but Dad saw this was an excellent opportunity to educate two new commercial and passenger vehicle disciples.

Claire and I toured many great cultural centres with Dad, including Cheltenham, Handsworth, Manchester Chorlton, Nuneaton, Oldbury, Telford and perhaps the most iconic of them all: Hanley Bus Station. I am certain that Hanley Bus Station is the windiest and perhaps coldest location in the British Isles, which despite the warmth of my Dad's enthusiasm, remained a place of deep foreboding throughout our childhood.

Although often cold, bus stations were the places of refuge for bus photography. If any interesting bus was seen on the road, carnage ensued. Abandoning all his carefully rehearsed guidance for other road users, particularly those relating to lane discipline, Dad would swerve across lanes of traffic while reaching for a camera under the passenger seat, thus obscuring his view of oncoming traffic but not the view of the terrified passengers in the car.

Once close to the curb, brakes would be applied and the car door would be flung open. Dad raced across the road, with the car looking like a scene from *The Sweeney*, as he took a photo of another bus he hadn't seen from just that particular angle. The family developed a calm smile for members of the public staring aghast into the abandoned family saloon.

This was an event that repeated itself on every family outing, including holidays. On the plus side, these incidents meant neither Claire nor I were too self-conscious and it took an awful lot to embarrass us in later life.

Holidays were a great adventure. We had a touring caravan, which at least toned- down Dad's swerving across the highway, but led to some interesting lessons in navigation, marital harmony and reversing.

As we grew, Dad supported our formal education and supplemented it by passing on some of his encyclopaedic knowledge of buses and commercial vehicles. We became well versed in the advantages of the Dennis Loline Mk3; the differences between a Dennis Loline and a Bristol Lodeka; and the reasons why the Guy Wulfrunian was the greatest breakthrough in bus design. Not necessarily the most relevant lessons in the era of New Romantics, but it allowed us into his world.

Not satisfied with educating me and my sister, Dad decided the whole village should become immersed in the world of historic omnibuses.

In the Guy GS bus he had been restoring in a shed in Chelford, Dad took the unsuspecting villagers off on a trip to Harrogate, on the Trans-Pennine run. I think many had assumed we would be driving straight to Harrogate, have a picnic on the green or a nice afternoon tea in Betty's, before a comfortable drive back to Goostrey.

'Luckily' for them, the day started at the crack of dawn with a drive to the start in Manchester, followed by two hours looking at many, many buses in the drizzle. Once we finally boarded the bus we managed to accelerate to the dizzying heights of 30mph – the engine had lost some power over the years – and once we hit the Pennines things slowed to a crawl.

Many hours later, Harrogate was a welcome sight for everyone, including Claire and I who were trying to fade into the upholstery. After a brisk walk around Harrogate everyone piled back on the bus for another speed-defying trip home. That was the last time we spoke to many of our neighbours, and Dad couldn't understand why we had no takers for the following year's adventure!

Despite, or perhaps because of, Dad's attempt at educating us in the world of automotive engineering, Claire and I strayed off into the world of healthcare and left home to pursue our careers.

A few years later, the grandchildren – Isabella, Francesca and Sam – arrived on the scene, and Dad became "Grandad Bus". All three of the grandchildren loved spending time with their grandad, playing on the beach, dressing up as fairies, taking part in shows or chasing monsters.

We will all miss Grandad Bus, but are glad he was a part of our lives. We are better people thanks to his support and love.

Thank you Mike – as tributes go, that was a beauty!

And now a poem read by Robin and Jean's granddaughter Francesca.

**Francesca:**

### **A Plea From The Bus Driver**

As I set out on my journey today,  
Please help me to remember to watch all five mirrors, Two dozen windows, eight gauges, six warning lights, Six dozen faces, and three lanes of traffic.

I need to keep a third eye open for those wobbling bicycles, and daydreaming pedestrians.  
Especially those teenagers wearing headphones,  
Who are, frankly, in another world!

Help me to listen out for any car horns, trucks reversing, And police sirens.  
Not to mention ambulances, fire engines,  
And the two-way radio.

I need a hand for the gear lever, the steering wheel,  
The route list, and the indicators.  
And then there's the microphone for those misbehaving on the top deck!

I need to keep to time, but not get ahead of schedule, Check travel passes, and give the right change.  
Let that fella know that his is the next stop,  
And just one more thing,  
Smile as I go...!

Thank you, Francesca – I'm intrigued to know where you found that poem; it's great. So as we've heard, and I think established beyond any doubt: Robin liked a bus.  
But being a stickler for accuracy, he would perhaps like that clarified.

Like his first date with Jean. They were driving along to the arboretum when suddenly Robin wound down his window, so he could properly hear the engine of the bus behind. A Walsall Corporation bus to be specific. Jean, I'm guessing you could tell us the livery even now.

And Mike has already mentioned that the date of your wedding was shifted to the summer to avoid clashing with the autumn Motorshow.

You did get a three-week honeymoon though – a *driving* holiday. The Lake District, then Pitlochry at the start of the Highlands, and all the way up the West Coast to Scourie in Lairg. I've been there recently, and that last stretch along the coast is still a challenging drive today. What it must have been like six decades ago...

Yes Robin loved a drive. Especially one as complex as that through the scenic splendours of Scotland.

But Jean had to sometimes temper his enthusiasm, by spotting points of interest. Like speed cameras.

Isabella: I understand that when you were at what Jean called your "pious" age, you were outraged. You didn't think Granny should have to do this. "*Tell Grandad that he shouldn't be over the speed limit anyway,*" you'd plead – with some justification.

Macular degeneration eventually meant Robin's eyesight became too poor to allow him to drive. It was, says Jean, the worst day of her life.

Because it meant that she and Robin swapped roles. Jean became the designated driver. And Robin, who could barely see, would keep pointing out that Jean was too close to the car in front.

But then Robin was always generous with his comments to other road users. He'd be happy to advise that there was a fifth gear, which the hapless driver might care to use.

When he received a diagnosis of terminal cancer, Robin took the news philosophically. "*This will give me time to finish the Sunbeam Trolley Bus book,*" he said.

Sadly, it didn't.

Jean remembers a night soon after that diagnosis. Robin was restless. Unsettled. She presumed that he was mulling over what was happening to him. She asked him if he was worried about something.

“Yes,” he admitted. He was worried about what would happen to his collection of chassis numbers, his research materials, his books, magazines and model vehicles – the whole Hannay archive.

So before he died, Robin left three pages of instructions on what to do with his collection – which was bigger than you might expect.

You see, every time Robin bought a new model vehicle, he’d buy two. One to remain untouched in its original packaging. And one to be used to provide his family with an education on the subtle differences between operator liveries and to extol the virtues of the Guy Arab Mk IV – for which he produced the 1956 Commercial Motor Show brochure.

Robin joined the Omnibus Society in 1950, the PSV Circle in 1953 and the Historic Commercial Vehicle Society in the 60s. And he was a stalwart of the Model Bus Federation from its inception.

From his teenage years, Robin was also a subscriber to *Commercial Motor Magazine*. And he was a regular contributor to titles as diverse as *Buses*, *Classic Buses*, *Historic Commercial Vehicles* and *Vintage Roadscene*. Quite a range! And as we’ve heard, he published books about the history of AEC, Dennis and Guy Motors.

In his retirement Robin was never happier than when correcting “misconceptions” – particularly those related to the Guy Wulfrunian.

Throughout his life, he was a gentleman and a family man. Always turned out in a carefully matched collar, tie and pullover. Always shaved before breakfast. Sundays were for mowing the lawn, washing and fuelling the car and polishing the children’s shoes for school.

Jean says Robin was such a gentleman that he always walked on the road side of the pavement with her, so she never had to face the traffic.

Claire thinks it was just so he could see the buses.

Jean and Claire: I think you are probably both right.