

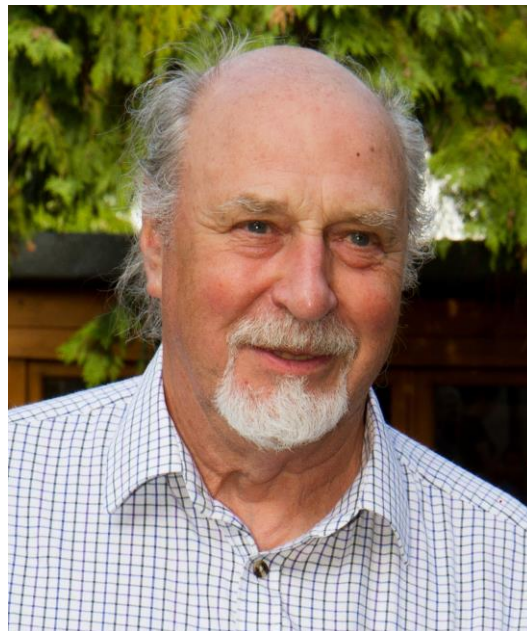
A Celebration of the life of

Leslie William Hayes

31 January 1934 – 18 June 2024

10 July 2024, City of London Cemetery & Crematorium

Celebrant: Kate Hobson



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Leslie Hayes was a devoted and greatly loved husband, father and grandfather who enjoyed nine decades of active and fulfilling life. He was kind, thoughtful, knowledgeable, friendly, hard-working and modest. He was a skilful craftsman who did everything properly and whenever something arose that required his hand, he used to ironically say 'Another five-minute job'; in the full knowledge that it was invariably anything but! Everyone liked him. Everyone thought highly of him.

Leslie was born at home in Claude Road in Leyton, the third child of William and Florence. His two older sisters, Dorothy and Jean also lived a very long life.

He was five when the war started, and he used to tell of the afternoon of 7th of September 1940 when he was sitting in the barber's shop being 'scalped' (as he would call it). At about 4.00 his dad rushed in saying he needed to get Leslie home because he'd seen German planes flying in. The barber shrugged it off, as there had been so many false alarms during the Phoney War, but it turned out that this was the first of two massive assaults at the start of the Blitz, and Leslie ran home with half a haircut. Later that evening, when the bombing resumed, he and his dad watched the London Docks going up in flames – a sight never to be forgotten. Soon after, Leslie was evacuated with his mother to Hertford where they stayed with a friend of his father's, and later, he was evacuated again to somewhere near Oxford.

Leslie remembers the Doodlebugs; and seeing a dogfight right above his head; a bomb that landed close by just as his dad was passing a glass of beer to the neighbour over the fence in celebration of Dorothy's wedding the day before; and the tail of an incendiary bomb that he wasn't allowed to keep – his dad having beaten out the flames when it landed on their Anderson shelter. A particularly exciting day was when the sweet shop up the road was hit – you can imagine the stampede of people running to collect the sugary booty.

Leslie always said that the war scuppered his schooling. By the time he was 11 or 12, he still couldn't really read. But he worked it out, largely through studying comics and magazines including Picture Post. His education was interrupted again when, in 1947, he was extremely ill in hospital with peritonitis. Without penicillin he might not have survived.

He left school at 14 to take up an apprenticeship at London and North Eastern Railway at Stratford where his father worked, where he was assigned to the coach-painting and signwriting department. It was all done freehand and Leslie became very good at it – while developing an enormous knowledge of paints, varnishes and mixes. One of the locomotives that he painted is in the National Railway Museum in York, and there's a photo of him standing beside it.

His working group was on piecework and only paid for the work they did, and Leslie often found himself making up for those who were less able or more slapdash than he was. But his hard work and skill were recognised when he was promoted to foreman. Some of his colleagues had been gassed in the First World War or suffered from shell shock. Leslie's own father was wounded twice, having joined up in 1914. Like most people, he didn't talk about it, but with hindsight, it's clear he too had PTSD. He had taken part in the Battle of Loos in 1915 and suffered a bad leg wound, although at least that meant he missed being sent to the Somme. One of Leslie's clear memories as a boy was seeing the hole left by the bullet in his dad's leg.

Not surprisingly, given his family's involvement in two World Wars, Leslie developed an interest in twentieth century military history – and history generally. It started early when he went with friends to Drogheda to see the site of the Battle of the Boyne, and much later with Cathy, Ian and Margaret he visited the World War battlefields of the Somme, Ypres and the Normandy beaches. Nearer home there was the Imperial War Museum Duxford with its Second World War air shows featuring the 'Flying Legends'. Leslie could recall the names of nearly all the aircraft, even the more obscure ones.

In 1952, Leslie was called up for National Service and joined the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. He was posted to Egypt, where photos always show him with friends, laughing, but tensions were high in the Middle East and it was tough. Nearly everyone got dysentery – others sunstroke. Leslie had always liked being well turned out, with properly shined shoes and clean finger nails, which went down well at kit inspections. He even won 'Best Boy' award – twice. And he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

In 1954 it was back to the Stratford Works. His National Service counted as part of his apprenticeship so by then, he'd essentially finished it.

Leslie had many different, intersecting groups of friends – workmates; pub, jazz club or dance hall friends; and the arty set – students at St. Martins.

Margaret and Maureen, her twin, spotted Leslie at Leytonstone Library where they did their homework, because he came in so often to change his library books. He was tall, good-looking and very smart. He even got his suits made to measure by Harry Kirsch at Bakers Arms. He later came to know the group of sixth-formers that they were part of, which included John Lakeman.

Modern jazz was an abiding passion for Leslie, and Soho was the place to find it, particularly at Ronnie Scott's. There were also plenty of local clubs to hang out in, including the Red Lion, Leytonstone. He followed jazz through magazines too, and amassed an enormous collection of vinyl records, cassettes and CDs.

Leslie discovered cryptic crosswords in his twenties and became very adept at solving them. He continued completing at least one every day and entering competitions; he won the Saturday Guardian newspaper crossword 25 times. Most of his family and friends have a copy of the Chambers Dictionary on their shelves, as he had to resort to submitting his completed puzzles under different names.

Leslie and Margaret married in September 1959, and after three years in Harold Road, Leytonstone they moved to a house in Acacia Road that Leslie called 'Polyvilla', because he filled so many cracks with Polyfilla.

In 1962 Leslie's section of the Stratford Works closed down so he had to move on and, after a short time with British Rail, took a job in 1964 with London Transport (as it was then). He worked at bus garages all over London – Clapton, Upton Park, Ash Grove and Leyton to name but a few. But instead of painting by hand, he was eventually sticking on transfers. Where was the skill or pride in that? Mind you, it was useful having some spare paint for the children's bikes, which could be any colour so long as it was red!

In April 1967 they moved to a new-build town house in Prospect Road, Woodford Green, very near to John and Maureen, who became a second set of parents to the kids, as they were always round their house.

The late sixties and early seventies were characterised by lots of family holidays to B&Bs and holiday camps at seaside resorts along the south coast, and as the children got older they started going to Europe, drawn by the art and architecture. The children loved these holidays, as they were exciting, especially the journeys, which involved ferries, aeroplanes and trains – and buying their favourite magazines to read on them.

They used public transport until Leslie got his licence in 1981, after which they started driving up to Scotland or – even better – taking the Motorail to Stirling to set them on their way. Leslie hated being late, particularly when travelling, and once arrived so early at Euston even the staff hadn't turned up, but at least they were first off at the other end! It meant they could explore further north in the Highlands and up to the Isle of Skye without too much driving. They all fell in love with the scenery and they carried on going there for 15 years. When Cathy moved to Edinburgh in the late eighties and Michael was at university in Newcastle, Leslie and Margaret could make stops there too on the way back.

Underpinning all this family activity was the partnership Leslie and Margaret formed to support their children. They taught them life skills by example, and the children in turn respected that and never abused it by making undue demands. We'll hear more from them later.

Leslie was a regular at Leyton Orient from 1945 when he got his season ticket, and if he couldn't get to a match he'd watch it on TV. But he enjoyed almost any sport – boxing, snooker, darts, golf, the Olympics and even a bit of tennis. His knowledge of sport – not just football – was phenomenal.

Leslie made the most of his retirement in 1992 right up to the Covid lockdowns. Even while Margaret was still working they started to do more travelling, including some wonderful art and architecture cultural tours all round Europe – France, Spain, the Czech Republic, Italy and Germany.

The artistic, film and musical delights of London were within easy reach – from Covent Garden to lunchtime concerts in churches, from the Tate to the Royal Academy, and of course the whole of the South Bank, including free jazz.

Restaurants featured large too, either in town or more locally – often with family and friends. Birthdays were always special occasions, right up to Leslie's 89th. He was very generous and insisted on paying the bill, but laughed it off saying it was only because he had a travel pass and a good pension and nothing else to spend his money on.

Sharing good times, pursuing joint interests, ever learning and absorbing knowledge and culture – these were things to delight in for Leslie, but family is what mattered most – Margaret and their children, Cathy, Alley and Michael, and their grandson Sean, were the most important part of his world.

Memories from Alley, Michael and Cathy

ALLEY

Dad, you used to say that I was lucky. When I was young I helped you with the football pools, when I was older I submitted your entries for crossword competitions and we would often win, I gave you my Grand National ticket in April and my horse came in first – we were all surprised as I do not know anything about horses! I am lucky, I was lucky to have you as my dad.

You were always there to help. You drove us home from hospital when Sean was born and you also took us to register his birth. You would do the washing up or drying up at family gatherings as you liked things being clean and tidy.

I remember you laughing with Sean at Laurel & Hardy films and playing football with him in the garden. You wished you had his energy!

Until recently you were still completing odd jobs around the house. In January, I watched you using white paint to stencil your door number on your new recycling boxes. You did a good job but I would not have expected anything less.

You were wise, generous and you had a genuine interest in people – when you were in hospital you asked the staff to stop what they were doing and talk to you about their lives and families. If they said they were too busy, you asked if they could come back later.

We will miss you dad.

MICHAEL

With a lifetime of memories to look back on, my childhood memories of Dad are particularly special.

Dad was kind, helpful and supportive, and wanted all three of us to do our best. I remember him successfully teaching me to spell from a young age, which stood me in good stead at school and every day since.

There was a general order and organisation in how Dad did things, combined with a wise realism which all three of us have adopted during our lives and has kept us on our metaphorical feet.

My childhood memories of Dad are many, including his expert painting of my model planes, taking me on a Sunday morning to the market at Club Row and the Sunday afternoon rush outside, upon hearing the ice cream van, to buy a small block of Neapolitan ice-cream, once Dad had quickly found some change. Once the block was purchased and safely unwrapped in the kitchen, it was accurately cut into five equal slices by Dad, who being the craftsman, was normally in charge of such important duties.

As I grew up, Mum and Dad have always been there to help us if we needed it, and I couldn't have asked for any more love and support.

I cherish my memories with Dad, including my phone conversations after the Arsenal match had finished, to give him my post-match analysis which he was always interested in hearing.

I miss Dad so very much, but I am pleased to know he had 32 years of happy retirement, to enjoy his favourite things of family, jazz, art, culture, crosswords, history, food, travel and watching sport, especially football.

CATHY

'Not, How Did He Die, But How Did He Live?'

*Not, how did he die, but how did he live?
Not, what did he gain, but what did he give?
These are the units to measure the worth
Of a man as a man, regardless of his birth.
Nor what was his church, nor what was his creed?
But had he befriended those really in need?
Was he ever ready, with words of good cheer,
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?
Not what did the sketch in the newspaper say,
But how many were sorry when he passed away?'*

This poem immediately made me think about Dad's fine qualities. He was a kind, caring, intelligent and principled person, and my memories of him are treasured ones. It is of some comfort that we had his positive presence in our lives over such a long time.