

CATHEDRAL

You may be surprised to hear that a theme running through what I would like to say is big-headedness. Starting at the very beginning the story goes that on 26th April 1924 at The Grove, Caistor Road, Market Rasen as the second son of Bernard and Doris (nee Mawer) Cooper was delivered the attending mid-wife in a style not usually associated with such a lady in such a situation was heard to exclaim "What a ..great big.. head". I am led to believe that she put it more strongly than that.

So, literally big-headed but only in terms of capacity not remotely in terms of attitude. Throughout, I shall be as objective as I can but I do not imagine that there will be much argument if I say that there can have been very, very few individuals whose modesty was in such inverse proportion to the character, (the talents and abilities) and the achievements of which that person had every right to be proud. That recognition for father is left to the rest of us. He played the organ brilliantly but he never blew his own trumpet. That is not to say that he was incapable of being quietly pleased with himself on occasions.

If, however, my sisters and I had put to him that on his passing a reasonable number of people would wish to celebrate his life and to pay tribute to all that he meant to them and all that he had achieved he would probably have merely shrugged and allowed his silence in response to indicate that he was not particularly in favour of the idea. From our earliest discussions, however, we have wanted to allow as many as wish to do so to be part of this Celebration.

Many are aware of the strength and depth of the respect and affection in which father was held and the letters, cards and messages received by the family entirely reflect this. Thank you sincerely for all of those and thank you for being here today in such reasonable numbers.

And thanks also to the Cathedral and to Rev'd Nick Brown for accommodating us and for being so helpful with arrangements. I hope that father would now have to agree that Lincoln Cathedral is the appropriate place to get together not only in terms of its capacity but possibly even more in terms of its symbolism, aptly reflecting how widely within the county which it dominates father was loved, respected and admired.

As he was his whole life very much a Market Rasen man we do not forget St Thomas' Church where father was a churchwarden for many years. We also thank Rev'd Claire Burnett for conducting the family service at the Crematorium this morning with such compassion.

And we definitely thank Bill Marshall, who has been a patient tower of strength and worked extremely hard along with his staff to bring everything together today.

We, including mother, knew very well that we shared father with other families. That of Market Rasen, of which he was very much an ingrained part, that of the Land Agency profession along with Lincolnshire farming and many of its families and of the associated but distinct world of field sports; the fraternity of Freemasonry and not forgetting the small but highly significant world of music. Luckily there was plenty of father to go round; so much capacity within that big head that all of those strands of his life received his full attention, as much as if each were the only one.

Over more recent years whilst listening to father giving a eulogy to a friend (always with some humour involved) - and he did this for those for whom he did not play the organ – I had the increasingly less idle thought of who might perform the same service for him when that which was never going to happen eventually did. Two particular things have given the answer to that question. Firstly, however busy he was elsewhere, the strands of father's life all met at home - and he definitely would not have been able to lead the life he did without mother by his side – so that I hope I can throw a little light on how those strands intertwined; and, secondly, my sisters said I should do it. As many will have heard him say over the years father well understood female persuasiveness and influence having lived very happily with it for most of his life.

And as I say our mother of course plays a huge part the story to be told. They lived at Clare Lodge from their wedding in November 1951 until 2004. I wish to repeat what I said at a family wedding years ago - how fortunate we 4 are to have been brought up with so much love and hard work in such wonderful surroundings as were created at Clare Lodge. It also became a wonderful place for grandchildren and helped forge the utterly loving bond between them and their grandparents. The little ones were originally very cross but eventually forgave Granny & Grandpa for downsizing to The Woodlands. Mother passed away in December 2015. It was a wonderful thing that Dad lived out his days at home and this beyond all else was due to the way in which Alison took on the running of the house and general care. For a number of those years father was still at work and was occasionally heard to say, 'stop fussing, Alison'. Unselfishly and untiringly she did not and he was of course very grateful. Latterly more care was needed and we thank Connie, Steph and Julia who came in to help immeasurably. Alison says that they all fell under Dad's spell. Amongst those at Market Rasen Surgery we particularly thank Dr Rob Weekes who is as close as one gets to an old-fashioned GP.

Now, in no way do I claim to have the full picture; I don't actually think anybody does. There are still, however, many memories to be gathered together and I unashamedly fill in some family gaps with the reminiscences and tributes of others. And as it is not my place to attempt to express what father meant to you I happily quote others (anonymously) and allow them to do the job.

Back to the beginning. Father moved from The Grove to Clare Lodge in his pram, his older brother, Rex, no doubt toddling alongside. Photographs show two happy boys often on the remarkable grass court which was formed of about two inches of sand over brick and which was therefore rarely too wet for play.

Staying with local sport, which played a massive part in his life both before and after the War father played cricket and football for MR, hockey for Brigg, golf and badminton but particularly tennis for The Willoughby Lawn Tennis Club, MR. The club used the court at Clare Lodge for matches and of an evening we would wait to see who turned up to play as couples rotated around. We don't remember any other than Jack Austin playing with father and they nearly always seemed to play at least one rubber at Clare Lodge – nothing to do with home advantage I'm sure, although they would have known where the bricks were buried. Anyway, in these games it appeared that one couple was doing the running around while the other with a mixture of classical style from father and impudent dinks from Jack made life awkward for them. Jack had severely damaged his right arm in a motorcycle accident and had taught himself to play left handed and could not hit but could finesse better than anyone I have ever seen. Jack sadly died at the age of 100 last year and their last chance to reminiscence was actually at Jack's 100th birthday party. Dad came home saying that they could not remember ever losing. At the combined age of 197 and looking back at matches played 50 years previously they probably never did.

A result of the cricket, actually from keeping wicket and needing two cartilage operations (one performed in India), was that he walked bone on bone from the late 1950's taking the consequences of the techniques involved at that time. Most of the time who could tell (and he did insist on putting his socks on whilst standing up for very, very many years as well). Here I pay tribute to Jonathan Wilkinson with whom father developed a great friendship and a joint (if you will pardon the expression) interest in knees and trees. Father who had developed a genuine interest in forestry during his time at Cambridge helped with schemes for woodland at Norton Disney and Jonathan patched up his knees occasionally, knowing there was nothing he could fundamentally do and that his patient did not necessarily help himself. I remember one evening after another emergency call to take father y looking at a knee the size of a small football and as red and angry as it is possible to imagine. After treatment Jonathan in the most resigned way it is possible to imagine asked "and

what are you doing tomorrow, Geoff?”. “Oh, I’ve got a meeting in Louth”. “Well I think you ought to stop at home and rest the knee”. No more said. Next day meeting at Louth.

A small Market Rasen memory from a time when agriculture was more central to the town. Some will remember the BBC radio programme ‘Down Your Way’; father was one of the few ‘selected’ to speak to the wonderful Brian Johnston and their meeting took place in his office which had that lovely bow window overlooking the Market Place. Father even made an impression on BJ , who in his later voice-over introducing the item, said that he had come to see the auctioneer with a twinkle in his eye. Classical music was not allowed and father’s choice for his section was Fats Waller’s ‘Alligator Crawl’, although I am a little surprised that it was not ‘Ain’t Misbehaving’.

Other contributions to Rasen life included acting as Clerk to the Governors at De Aston School for very many years; and for probably more than 60 years he was Secretary of the Eleemosynary Charity, an extremely understated Market Rasen body open to requests from local people in need of assistance.

His schooling largely took place in Market Rasen, going from the Church of England School on Willingham Road to De Aston with the school year 1938/39 spent at Ashville College in Harrogate. He came back to Rasen when war started.

His own wartime service began on board ship and a journey from Glasgow to Bombay. He actually turned 18 on board. Father used to give out snippets of his experiences and for a long time we children had the impression that he did not see action. Eventually, one evening at The Woodlands some of us led by a group of grandchildren (about half an hour after being told that he did “not want to talk about that”) learned quite a bit. Possibly released by this when he was asked by the Rotary Club to fill a gap and speak at one of their lunchtime meetings he came up with talk entitled ‘On His (in those days) Majesty’s Service’. The first thing to remember is that this talk when put together was not about him at all but a history of the time; the second is that whilst looking out a World Atlas or hearing draft suggestions of what he might say I did slightly tire of his saying “do you think they will really be interested?”. Of course Rotary hung on his every word as he described the boat journey, being part of a contingent of many hundreds of men and a few dozen nurses, which called in to West Africa and Cape Town before reaching Bombay by which time all of the nurses were married and father had been ‘promoted’ from the belly of the ship to an upper deck. Thence by Indian trains and ox-carts up to the North West frontier. Never a friendly area and part of what is now Pakistan nor far short of Afghanistan. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lt into the 6th Rajputana Rifles in October 1943 and rose to Captain. In early days as a junior subaltern a particular duty was

to take messages from the main fort to the regiment's outpost up in the hills riding a small, not particularly speedy motorcycle regularly being the target of tribesmen as he drove up the passes. He (and we) were lucky that it was at other times that their accuracy in other instances was better. Another of father's duties (remember he was only around 20) was to pass on the worst possible news to families of fallen comrades. Later the regiment was in Burma as part of the fight against the Japanese. Enough hazard there you would think but he said that the most dangerous thing he had to do was crowd control on Delhi Station during Partition. He had seen how Hindu, Muslim and Sikh had served together in his regiment and was saddened to see how hostility quickly developed between these groups. This exposure may, however, help to explain his calmness and skills in mediation when, for instance, families or groups within communities or within Masonry disagreed over a matter of absolute life and death.

On returning from India father went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge and gained a First Class Honours degree in Agriculture and Estate Management. He had been due to go up in 1942 to study Law but a little detail of how plans changed by 1947 will come later. I have a lovely letter, also containing great information, from the College archivist including her saying how relatively grim College life was with rationing contributing to complaints about meagre and cold food. Father had met mother in April 1947 after spying her from the aforementioned bow window as she came out of the Midland Bank. He used the Market Rasen grapevine to find out where she was staying and began courting, travelling up and down the Fosseway to Stratford upon Avon. Mother went to the traditional May Balls at Emmanuel so life at Cambridge cannot have been all bad.

He started work at George Mawer & Co (the successor in title to Cooper, Mawer and Burkitt) alongside his father, Jack Burkitt and the equally newly arrived Alan Smith. His own father sadly died in 1956 placing a very significant burden on a young family man. Very many heartfelt tributes to him and to his work have been passed on in the last month. Since he, for example, took stocktakings on particular farms for 60 years it is not surprising that many of these have come from the third generation of families for whom father acted. Many say how grateful they are for the advice they received and how arrangements made have stood the test of time. The sentiments are all similar and I do not want to go into them all, just pick a few choice words because these will be shared by many. 'A Market Rasen legend', 'tremendously talented gentleman', 'a gentle giant', 'esteemed in his profession', 'so wise and remarkable', 'a loyal and trustworthy friend', 'a jack of all trades and master of them all'. Actually from just one letter but a collection gathered by a reliable source!

A good story, recounted by his son, is of a local farmer, who soon became a life-long friend, who first met my father when he was acting for 'the other side' in a negotiation. Apart from the friendship the outcome of their meeting being that father from that point on acted for that family rather than against it. The same letter along with many others reflects on the well-known phrase "now, let's be clear about this" meaning either 'I don't think you have quite understood the point so we will go over it again' or 'you may not quite have gathered the particular inference implied between the lines'.

The other phrase which crops up and has actually done so for many years is that father knew more family secrets than anyone else in Lincolnshire. Possibly true. But absolutely true is the fact that secrets they were, are and of course will always remain.

And finally on a professional note I would like to thank and pay tribute to all those at George Mawer, far too many over 70 years to mention individually but including generations of hard-working secretaries one of whom wrote saying "He certainly kept me on my toes not just with hunting down maps and the adding up of many stocktakings but woe betide me if I slipped up on my grammar. I was often referring to the dictionary". Such ladies looked after him lovingly and latterly Nick and Kath have supported him both professionally and lovingly. But above all I mention a young man who arrived in Rasen in 1962/63 and has been alongside father ever since, referring to Dad as 'a second father'. So I pay tribute to my half-brother, Mike Perkins, and thank him for the companionship he shared with father over so many years and for having him in the office until he was 95. Mike, you may be a good half way there but you have probably not finished yet.

Father's hard work is illustrated by his very often going back to the office after supper to get a few things done while it was quiet - if he was at home the phone rang anyway - and he was able to unwind before coming home at the Gordon or Aston Arms with Jack Austin, Eddie Ottewell and other friends.

Alongside all this professional work for others father bought Otby House Farm in the mid 1950's. He would admit to having been in the right place at the right time but the planning with which various agreements were put together benefitted three or four farming families at the time and in due course my own as Freda and I have been able to raise our family in remarkable surroundings.

Otby undoubtedly meant a lot to him, we left from there this morning. He could use some otherwise spare time driving a combine after a day at the office and at weekends - and it was a shame when three smaller John Deeres went down to two bigger Claas and there was no longer a combine for him to drive. One way or another he saw almost 80 harvests at Otby and latterly (including July and

August this year) would drive out to have a few rounds in the combine cab and I thank Tom Dobbs for accommodating him in such a friendly manner.

As well as a working farm a shooting enterprise developed at Otby. Behind this – as father had plenty of other things going on – was the meticulous planning of his very great friend, Rob Collett. I will just put in one of those moments of quiet satisfaction which is remembered by one correspondent from a time when father was well advanced in years but had stood on his favourite peg on his favourite drive. This gentleman in question knows Otby well and asked father as he came up to him after the drive how he had got on. “Moderate. I got 5 ..out of 6”. He managed a stand or two towards Christmas 2019 so shot up to the age of 95. I am grateful to Dave Brumby for looking after him so well on those later occasions when Dad had to lean on the bonnet of his car. As Dave says ‘if he could see ‘em he could hit ‘em’.

Dad and Rob enjoyed happy times with the then syndicate at Otby, and shooting in many other locations but equally they enjoyed fishing trips, originally to Scotland but also around the world. Their ladies were included in one trip, being dropped off on the Gold Coast with instructions to drive down to Sydney whilst the men went after marlin off the Great Barrier Reef. Other marlin fishing off West Africa and salmon fishing in Russia and Iceland were also included. And the way in which Richard kept that connection going after Rob died was greatly appreciated. The last trip in 2018 finished with Dad flying home.. without his glasses. Fairly urgent phone calls were made to Scotland where the glasses were happily found .. on the riverbank where a ghillie had found father asleep.

And who would have thought with the full life already described that father would have had time for a massive involvement in Freemasonry. He held the highest offices in the Province of Lincolnshire as Assistant and Deputy then Provincial Grand Master (PGM) from 1978 to 1997. His standing in that family mirrors, possibly even exceeds (since it reached onto a national stage), that in Lincolnshire land agency. I will allow a very senior Lincolnshire Freemason, who wrote a very kind letter to me, to speak for that fraternity in order to illustrate for those who will not be aware of it father’s standing in another field; he says “ Your father was, in my opinion, the most respected Freemason in Lincolnshire whose courtesy, wit and wisdom was legendary. His memory for peoples’ names and situations was sharp and he could always be relied upon for a very honest opinion given with tact and diplomacy. He was a role model for everyone to follow and his quiet, unflappable presence made everyone feel at ease”. JUST LIKE LAND AGENCY THEN. In this context I will just mention something father occasionally spoke of from his regimental mess in India; he recounted how struck

he was by the way in which a particularly senior General made a point, during an evening with the mess, of going down to have a word with the most junior ranks at the far end of the room. How many Freemasons have told me how they remember, from their most early days, the PGM going out of his way to have a word with them?

Father's talent for speaking was well recognised but particularly so within Masonry I think with the delivery appearing so fluent that it was easy to overlook the fact that no trace of a note ever appeared. As PGM he had to give a yearly 'State of the Order' address which needed to be recorded in the annual yearbook. How was this to be done with no written record to hand? Those involved just had to listen very carefully. These addresses and other speeches must, however, have been practiced and I am guessing that Sunday morning walks at Otby may have been where this often happened.

I am told that this ability was recognised and admired beyond the boundaries of Lincolnshire and indeed high office included involvement in activities in London and his long tenure in office led to him climbing the ranks of PGM's nationally. I thought, when I joined and became aware of a little of what rank meant that he must have been about the most senior commoner in the country with only Dukes and Lords above him. The D o Kent was in father's time and still is the Grand Master and one night father arrived home on the late train from London, disturbed mother and climbed into bed telling her that he had been attending on the D of Kent all day to which a sleepy voice replied "Yes. I expect the Duke is getting into bed too, telling the Duchess that he has had GMC with him all day".

He retired from his highest offices in 1997 and continued to support and to contribute to the Order for the rest of his life. And again not to forget Market Rasen; Bayons Lodge remained his undoubted masonic home.

The remaining strand is music. In his teens father would be brought into Lincoln to have organ lessons with Mr Harry Trevitt who was Deputy Organist in this place although the lessons took place in what is now the Museum at the bottom of Broadgate. Father must have been encouraged; still as a very young man he used to cycle from Rasen, up Willingham Hill to play at services at Ludford Church. He occasionally said that the only thing he might have wanted to be if not a Land Agent and Auctioneer was a professional organist. The War obviously interrupted that musical training but what a wonderful legacy of enjoyment both for he himself and for those who listened to him play that training gave. Childhood memories are of going up to bed and listening to no end of different styles of music from the piano with the most personal being some Fats Waller and father's own extemporised Variations on a Theme of 'I Had a Little Nut Tree' with hints of 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'.

He always played the latter at weddings, possibly some funerals, entertaining the congregation before the ceremonies began. To her surprise he played his cousin Jean Burkitt (nee Mawer) into church at her wedding with 'Jeannie with Light Brown Hair'. A bit of a twinkle there.

And at the end of this life goes on. He will never be forgotten and 12 grand-children may have learned some things they did not know before today and 6 (maybe more to come) great-grandchildren will hear stories of Great Grandpa. Rosie and Ruby may retain memories of him and the two youngest, first cousins Oliver (born 27th November) and George (born 30th November) will see a photograph of the two of them taken with their great grandfather on 6th December 2021. So with all that has passed, all that we are here to celebrate he was a family man at the last.

Thank you

And as he used to say "I'll be off then" but I would like to ask Rev'd Brown to let father have the final word. This is a letter written by father to the Senior Tutor at Emmanuel College, a Market Rasen man and very good friend of grandfather Cooper. The two of them may have got their heads together but there is no doubt that this letter reflects the point in father's life from which he set out on the course which has led us all here today.