

One of our brother's best qualities was his determination to be precise. I am a little nervous therefore in relating a brief history of his life and beg his and your forgiveness for any slight errors when it comes to dates.

He was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1938' the first child of Guy and Barbara. As an agricultural officer in a reserved occupation our father had been sent to the island, then a British colony, with instructions to sort out a disease devastating the fruit crops. When a baby our parents would later claim that his crying kept the holidaying future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles awake in a next door hotel room; this apparently leading to his lukewarm attitude to the British involvement in the Suez fiasco ! Robert would take a lifelong pleasure in dramatic exaggeration. By all accounts they lived a fairly straightforward colonial life only interrupted a year later by the arrival of a brother, John. In 1945 the family returned to England in what Robert would describe as the slowest and oldest ship of the convoy constantly shadowed by threatening U boats.

They arrived in an England that they were told was 'home' but must have looked anything but; dark, colourless and cold, with the cities of Liverpool and London that they travelled through devastated by bombing. They briefly lived with our grandparents in Kent before our father bought the mixed dairy farm Whitemoor in Devon' this beginning one of the happiest periods of Robert's life. He was sent away to the academically relaxed Westbourne House School in Sussex where he was later made head boy and returned to Devon in the holidays where he and his brother could roam the countryside of the Teign valley at will. They were fairly typical children of their time, building and flying model aeroplanes and catching butterflies and conducting various experiments' one of which involved dropping the cat Wortchis from a first floor window to see if she really did land on all her legs. I'm relieved to say the experiment was a success and Wortchis stalked off merely discomfited.

The farm was sold and the family, by then with 3 boys, moved to Chart Sutton in Kent in 1952 when our father took a position at the Commonwealth Bureau of Plantation Crops. Robert changed school to become a day boy at Sutton Valence. He was not particularly sporting but on one cycle home he and John met a local boy of

about 9 yrs old who they challenged to a game of scratch cricket. Robert was annoyed to be bowled out 1st ball but the young Derek Underwood went on to play for Kent and then England. Robert excelled academically, eventually winning an exhibition to Exeter College, Oxford much to the surprise of the headmaster who had been expecting the award to go to the school head boy. Meantime something of that convoy experience must have rubbed off on him because he chose the navy for his national service, serving on land in Chatham and Yeovilton and on board HMS Vanguard at Devonport. He studied modern history at Oxford with Alan Bennett amongst others. This was another very happy period. The stories are many but he used to tell one that perhaps shows his talent for self mockery. Coming back to his rooms after a couple of beers too many he managed to crawl with great difficulty through a grating in the college wall only to be greeted by college security who smugly proceeded to show him the wide open gates. He rowed for his college and went for holidays in Greece, a country he loved.

On coming down from Oxford he decided to enter the legal profession and took his law degree in London coming, at least so our mother said, first in his entire year. He was called to the bar, went on to become a barrister specializing in tax and for over 46 successful years worked in Lincolns Inn. In 1962 the family with the addition of 2 more brothers had moved to Sutton Valence where they owned a sheep and soft fruit farm, Robert returning from London each day with brief case and Evening Standard. This he would give to the dog with instructions to take it to our father. Father would then have to spend ages trying to persuade the dog to give it up. He enjoyed these little idiosyncratic rituals. He was immensely supportive of our parents during this time but after our father died in 1983 and mother began to think of moving to Devon permanently he bought Keepers Cottage in East Sutton determined that this part of Kent was to be his home and the long family association with it be maintained.

He spent many happy holidays walking in the Highlands and Switzerland or sailing with his cousins off the west coast of Scotland and he took what for him were the adventurous decisions to visit relatives in America and Australia. He enjoyed gardening and bird watching, needless to say being able to identify them all without the need for reference books

Many people here today will know of his close involvement with the village and the church, as they will with his work for the Conservative party, and they can perhaps speak with more knowledge than I can. But his family was always central to his life. He spent much time with our mother during her long final illness and he attended carefully to her financial affairs. He took a great interest in the extended family's joint ownership of a Devon wood and the running of Peter's nursery business and always asked after the progress of his nieces and nephews' frequently advising their parents on the most appropriate way to bring up children. To them he was not quite the avuncular uncle but his arrival could not be ignored.

His conversation, and there was a lot of it, was always informative, frequently entertaining and surprising. It ranged widely, from praise to a niece for the attention she gave her hair to a detailed and exhaustive breakdown of the disposition of the British fleet at Jutland, from a clear explanation as to why whichever government was in power was making a mess of the economy to the issues surrounding the installation of a clock on the tower of this church. Brought up in the age of the Hornblower novels, the navy and its role in British history was a continuing fascination for him and something he constantly came back to. I suspect his knowledge was second to none and he was very proud of his country's history. As his cousin Oliver says, "For me, my cousin was a character out of Dickens - idiosyncratic to the point of eccentricity, talkative to the point of garrulousness and kindly to the point of, well, kindness."

Robert was deeply grateful to the friendship and support he received especially during his long and brave struggle against illness. In particular we should mention his cousin Alec, Peter and Wendy Malby, Angela Stainton James, the Skinners and the Worsfolds and many others in the 3 Suttons and further afield.

After our parents died Robert quite naturally became head of the family. He was extraordinarily helpful and generous to his brothers and their families, a constant guide and support; he was always quick to forgive and never expected thanks. But most of all he was a rock who can never be replaced.

Martin Argles 4.5.12