

OBITUARY FOR DR JAMES ANTHONY FIDDIAN

Dr Fiddian, James, Jim, Dad, Grandpa, even Fiddian Major and Captain Fiddian - we knew him by different names and sometimes as a different person. To me he was just Dad.

If his life were a book I'd like to review the chapters that might have told his story.

Chapter 1 – Child

Born in Ashton in 1922 the 4th of 5 children there is no one left to tell us of his early days. I believe he had a happy childhood at least until he was sent to boarding school in Windermere. At 10 Fiddian major (his younger brother being minor) shone at football having "played well at back" and "having a splendid kick". He then went on to Manchester Grammar, receiving the school certificate in 1938. He often spoke of wonderful summer holidays spent on the farm in Fulbourn, Cambridge with his many cousins. At this time he saw farming as his likely career.

Chapter 2– Soldier

The outbreak of war in 1939 brought his childhood to an abrupt end. I cannot but believe that the next six years had a profound effect on him though he never spoke to us about this or his experiences overseas. He joined the T A in 1940 serving in the ranks. In 1942 he was appointed as 2nd Lieutenant. He was released from service in 1946 with the honorary rank of captain.

One good thing did occur during this time... he met and married mother, Audrey, in 1943.

Chapter 3 – Doctor

In 1946 he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge to study medicine, receiving a BA in 1948. He then went on to King's College Medical School in London to complete his medical and surgical degrees in 1952. Numbers 1 and 2 sons and a daughter had arrived by then!

The family then moved back to Ashton where Dad and Mum remained for 55 years in the same house! He took over the family practice from his sister, Barbara, and worked as a GP for 30 years. Although generally well- liked and respected his grumpiness could sometimes affect both patients and family. Deep down we believe that he was unhappy in this career, when GP's worked long hours with little cover at night or weekends, but he made the best of it until his retirement was possible. Mother even ended up as his assistant as he tended to scare his secretaries away!

Chapter 4- Dad

The arrivals of another daughter and third son completed the family. For some reason they benefited from more benign parenting but perhaps this was just a sign of the times. Work seemed to get in the way of our contact with Dad. We saw him at breakfast and morning school runs but he was not at his best at that time of day. Evening surgeries meant that we had tea without him most days. Except on Tuesdays, when he played golf in the afternoon. We all watched him coming down the garden path. If he'd won you could tell and he'd be in a good mood and it was worth hanging around, perhaps even extra pocket money was possible. Oh dear, if he'd played badly it was generally best to keep out of his way.

I learnt quite a bit caddying for him - the steady swing, the joy of smoking on a golf

course and an extensive vocabulary of curses. We all looked forward to high-days and holidays because then we found Dad at his best. Nick remembers cricket matches on the field at Barnsbury Farm, Fulbourn where we all stayed in a huge tent next to the hut. Jacky reminded me of endless games of French cricket on the beach in Wales or on summer evenings in the garden. Judy especially mentioned the brilliant holidays in Spain and Italy and the endless boozing. We'll hear some of Bill's memories later. When relaxed he was generally great fun, especially with company and after a drink or two, when he would become a great raconteur and keep us all in stitches. You just had to remember to let him win at cards or risk putting a damper on things. One thing I learnt very recently from one of my sisters is you could wind him round your little finger when funds were needed. Neither brother mentioned this though!!

Chapter 5— Grandpa

I believe he found his true vocation in life as a Grandpa since by then he had retired and so it was really just one long holiday! He had 14 grandchildren in all and we have 11 here today. I've really given so much of Grandpa's history for your benefit, I loved my Granddad (Dad's dad) very much like you loved yours but when he died in my 16th year I wasn't told straight away or allowed to go to the funeral. (It wasn't done in those days) Anyway, I think you all share very common memories of Grandpa. His chasing you around the garden and getting you excited just before bedtime. His scraping you with his beard stubble and of course the knuckle screws in the ribs (which almost got social services involved on one occasion). You were the only ones who roused him from morning grumpiness and, although latterly he couldn't remember which particular grandchild you were, he knew you belonged.

Chapter 6— Child again

Tricia and I were blessed about 3 years ago when Dad came to live with us and then close by. By then he was severely ravaged by his loss of memory but totally benign and still good fun. Tricia has been a treasure with him, seemingly adopting him after the death of her own father a year before, but as a child rather than a Dad. During a year with us he showed a different side to his character. A love of flowers, birds and nature in general, with often-insightful observations. Mike (Hooley) has also been a brick, amusing Dad (and Dad amusing him!) and taking him out to the pub. We are also grateful to the staff of Chesham Bois, who looked after him so well in his final home, and who loved his jokes and witty comments. Some of us were lucky enough to spend time with him on his last birthday. He performed well throughout and finally spotted Nikki's chocolate cake. Failing memory can have advantages - he had a big piece, then another and another. Finally after 4 slices of cake he stood up and announced it was time to go back to the others!

On Tuesday 20th April I visited Dad in Wycombe hospital where he spent his last month. He slept peacefully for a while and then I think he went off to join the others one last time.

Let's all remember him with pipe in mouth, crossword on the table, a G and T to hand and preferably a dog and/or a grandchild at his feet.

Paul Fiddian 3 May 2010