

Funeral Mass – John Christopher Bartholomew

Tribute by John E Bartholomew

John Bartholomew was a great man. A kind, reflective, warm and humble man. A man my brothers Philip, Christopher, Patrick, Ivon and I have had the privilege to know and love as our father.

Though quiet-spoken, he was a relentless communicator actively seeking out meaningful connections with people he knew well or people he just met briefly. He cared. He made time and showed a respect and genuine interest in everyone.

It feels impossible to do justice to such a rich life as his in a just few minutes. He spent all of his 85 years on a tireless exploratory quest for knowledge: A journey dedicated to learning everything there was to know about our planet and the cosmos beyond. In his legacy, he leaves a home filled with books on geography, astronomy, meteorology, oceanography, nations and world cultures. But his exploration was as much about meeting and understanding people who were themselves the explorers - naturalists, mountaineers, mariners and even astronauts. His personal travels took him to six continents.

He was a man equally dedicated to caring for the needs of his family, colleagues, peers and friends. Since John passed away, I've been touched by the recollections of those who knew him.

John was born on the 15th January 1923 at 15 Palmerston Road in Edinburgh. He grew up with his elder sister Ailie and three younger brothers, Peter, Robert and Alick. He was given the name John to follow the family tradition and was the seventh in the line to bear that name. His father was a bit of a romantic and chose Christopher as his middle name after Christopher Columbus. Was this in some way an inspiration that foretold the passion that John would have for adventure and exploration?

According to his brother Robbie, John was in some ways the loner of the family as a child – quieter and reflective. But he was also the naughty boy of the family – fuelled by an insatiable curiosity. One day, his father brought home an axe to cut wood. It was brand new and sharp like a razor. He explained to the children how

dangerous it was and put it on top of a cupboard. “Johnnie”, as he was known then, noticed where it was hidden and when no one was looking he took it down to try it out on some logs. When the axe bounced off his knee, there was blood everywhere. He had severed an artery. He recovered, but bore that little scar for a lifetime.

That same curiosity coloured the life of a man who always had to try new things or see new places.

John had a zest for fun and adventure. Our childhood is filled with memories of weekend escapes into the countryside, often driving a little too fast over bumps or through puddles. It was fun!

If a river ford barred the road, John would ask a farmer if he could cross safely. If a tractor could cross, it was good enough for him - even with his Morris Minor! When he attended an international congress in Spain in the Seventies, he was the one to jump into the bullring to try his hand as a toreador. Aged 68, he fulfilled a life-long wish to visit Patagonia and trek through the Andean foothills.

Recognising John’s individual and outgoing personality, his father chose to send him to boarding school at Gordonstoun, away from the more regimented regime of a traditional private Edinburgh education.

The family moved to his grandmother’s house in Inveresk when John was 12. At that time, being active in the Kirk was an important part of family life, with three of the sons becoming Sunday school teachers.

John’s life journey, was also a quest for spiritual enlightenment. He was enquiring and exploring his faith and seeking a philosophy he could identify with. His journey led him eventually to convert to Roman Catholicism in 1954. Since that time, unless health stopped him, he never missed a Sunday Mass. For 45 years, he was active parisioner here at Saint Peter’s, as a reader and serving for a time on the Parish Council. He supported ecumenical causes with enthusiasm. Spiritually, John’s mind remained very open and yet in some ways quite private.

Like his father before him, he chose a continental bride. He married our mother Ginette Achard-James in 1956 in France. They shared a common journey for 52 years, committed to wholesome family values in raising their five sons and dedicated to each other to the end.

John passed on every aspect of his enthusiasm for the natural world with us. Evening meals were invariably times for sharing knowledge about people he had met, or facts about places, natural things or world events. He quizzed us regularly on our knowledge of geography, capital cities, countries, or river lengths.

His interests went beyond geography. On Tuesdays, he would go to his Edinburgh Business Club lunches. In the evening, he would bring out his little notebook to recount the titbits and anecdotes from the guest speakers, regardless of the theme. He kept notes on everything! Scissors were always by his side to snip cuttings from the newspaper on anything that could be remotely of interest in the future or worth keeping for posterity.

John belonged to many distinguished organizations and held senior offices in most. The Royal Scottish Geographical Society which he presided for several years enabled him to meet and play host to some of the most distinguished names in exploration of the 20th Century. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society based in London. He was an active member of the British Cartographic Society and served a term as Vice President of the International Cartographic Association. He sat on the Board of Governors of Scotus Academy where we went to school. Close to his heart was the mission of Scottish Rights of Way, whose meetings he attended faithfully until last year.

As a father, John was a gentle, forgiving man. His patience held on even through the rebellious years of five energetic teenage sons. He rarely raised his voice. A good listener, he supported us even if we embraced ideals that were different from his own. He encouraged individuality in his children, much as he had sought for himself.

The father-figure he was blossomed more after his retirement. He had the time to develop unique personal relationships with each of his 11 grandchildren. Finally taking off the ties he always wore and buying his first pair of jeans on a trip to the USA after he

retired, he became what we all wish for in a Grandfather - as playful as he was wise.

John was destined from childhood to continue the family tradition in mapmaking. At John Bartholomew and Son Limited, he took a great pride in the cartographic heritage of his family. His father was determined that John should *earn* rather than just inherit his place as his successor to maintain the excellence of that cartographic tradition. So concurrent with his Geography studies at Edinburgh University, he was required to complete an apprenticeship in his spare time as a cartographic draftsman.

Dad's passion for his maps and atlases was tireless - collecting them, drawing them and sharing his delight in them with everyone. Maps were not only something useful, but *something to be enjoyed*. It was with his *artist's eye* rather than any scientific method that he determined whether a map was "missing something" or "just right". He was a perfectionist and compromise was rarely acceptable.

Bartholomew's was a family firm of course. But the term family embraced all its employees. They were John's family too. "Mr John" as he was called is remembered by the staff as a perfect gentleman. He invested a lot of time listening and getting to know them on a personal level. They knew that if they had problems at home, he could and would offer encouragement. He cared in a genuine way. If an employee was in hospital, he would visit them and report back to his or her colleagues how they were doing. There was a tradition to bring a Christmas hamper home to retirees or their widowed spouses. Dad took the time to stay in touch and spend time with them.

John found it hard to say "no" when asked for help or advice. Even through his retirement years, new projects would fill his days. For us as a family, the view indicator he designed on the Braid Hills is our favourite of his legacies. So many childhood memories are of walks there with him, just behind our home, in all seasons and weathers.

Honesty and fairness were fundamental attributes to John. One story worth telling from his time at Gordonstoun involved a hurdles race. He was a keen athlete and loved running. In a significant hurdles race, the strongest boy who had potential to make it to the Scottish team stumbled and fell before the tape.

John won that race, but felt it right to cede his place to his unfortunate classmate, enabling him to move onto the national final.

John lived a full life. He never believed he would live to see the turn of the Millennium. Undaunted by the onset of ill health six years ago, he was determined to remain as active as possible. He never believed he would be able to celebrate his Golden Wedding Anniversary two years ago – a proud milestone. In his last few months he still rallied to the cause of the Scottish Rights of Way to attend their meeting. He also judged entries for the Bartholomew Award for Small Scale Mapping. In December, he was evaluating the newest Edition of his beloved Times Atlas – and comparing it carefully with an older version. The the end, he was true to the man he always was.

His last days were most precious with family always around him. The day before he died, celebrating his 85th birthday, he knew it was the end and roused his strength to join in with us to sing “Happy Birthday” one last time. He passed away peacefully in his sleep just before midnight on 16th January.

Thank you to all of you who knew him – you were each in a special way a part of his life. A part that counted. Thank you, Dad for playing such a priceless part in ours.

May you rest in peace.