



OBITUARIES

Michael McFadyean

David Page



Michael McFadyean was a GP and the son of a GP. He was a Scot, although one wouldn't have known from listening to him—except perhaps when he played the bagpipes. Rather than in Scotland, his childhood was spent in London, in Herne Hill, where he was born, where his father's surgery was, and where, in turn, Michael himself would practise. He was the middle child of three. Both of his siblings predeceased him.

As children, Michael and his older brother, Gordon, got up to all sorts of mischief. They were known locally in Scotland, where they regularly holidayed, as “they twa awfie boys” for such japes as relocating garden ornaments between gardens. Gordon also persuaded Michael to drink a can of oil, which made him very sick. Schooldays in wartime London weren't straightforward. Though living south of the river, Michael had to travel each day to University College School in Hampstead in the north: not easy in the blitz, and often necessitating extremely early starts.

Gordon's untimely death meant that Michael was allowed to go direct from school to university. He studied medicine at St John's College, Cambridge. Because of the war, his three year course was compressed into two, followed by three further years of medical training. It wasn't all study. At Cambridge Michael was captain of the college rugby team. He also famously played his bagpipes with the Dagenham Girl Pipers on VE night.

In 1949 he qualified from the Middlesex Hospital, where he had also met Barbara—their marriage was still going strong after 66 years.

Once qualified, Michael spent two years at Barnet Hospital. Then began two years' national service in the medical branch of the Royal Air Force. But Michael had picked up tuberculosis from a patient at Barnet and had to have half of one lung removed. The operation was delayed, which in current circumstances might not be worth mentioning, except that Michael's surgeon was the King's surgeon, and the postponement happened because the King needed surgery on the same day Michael was due to go to theatre. Sadly, in the King's case the operation was not a success. Happily, in Michael's case, it was.

The removal of part of his lung didn't stop him doing much more than many completely fit men would do: always climbing the stairs when he visited patients in high rise blocks, heavy medical bag in hand; racing sailing dinghies; and digging vegetable patches in heavy London clay. He usually won the fathers' 100 yard sprint at his sons' school sports days (they still have the two gallon bucket he won); and, of course, he continued to play the bagpipes. Only at the age of 80 did he decide he wasn't going to climb and prune trees anymore.

National service was “a blast” after the years of concentrated training. On one celebrated occasion, Michael happened on some target shooting and was invited to take part. The squaddies sniggered as he appeared to miss the target. But when the card was collected, his two shots had passed through the centre—not for nothing had he been captain of shooting at school.

Michael was a general practitioner for 32 years. He qualified in the year in which his father retired, and he became a partner in the Herne Hill practice his father had created. He was a GP of the old school: two surgeries a day, afternoon clinics, home visiting the rest of the day, and, frequently, half an hour for lunch in between and seldom home before 7 pm His additional duties included being the visiting medical officer for several old people's homes. He was clinical assistant at the dermatology clinic at King's College Hospital for 18 years, and later worked in the fracture clinic there. Up to the 1980s, if a patient rang in the middle of the night, he would get up, drive three or four miles, and attend to them. After getting back to bed, the next day started at the usual time.

For a while, in the late 60s and early 70s, Michael was also a part time volunteer police inspector in the City of London Special Constabulary. Most of his work with the specials involved conducting First Aid courses and medical examinations within the Force. Once, when he was out on foot patrol in the City of London with a partner in general practice, a tourist

approached, asking the way to the Tower of London. Directions were given with much gesticulating and raising of arms, which caused a London bus to screech to a halt beside them. The driver had thought the police were pulling him over. As it happened, the bus was headed for the Tower, so the tourist was helped aboard, thinking, no doubt, that London “Bobbies” were truly magnificent.

Christian faith was woven into the fabric of Michael’s life. He attended the Episcopal church in Dalbeattie while still in his mother’s womb and worshipped there, season by season, till the end.

He undertook the theological training that allowed him to be licensed as a reader, and in that capacity he served at St Paul’s church, Herne Hill, and at St Thomas’s in Winchelsea. We see him in cassock, surplice, and blue reader’s scarf, holding high the cross and administering communion. He led groups in prayer and Bible study, and he made sure there were people to read the Scriptures in worship—indeed, the last task he undertook was to recruit the readers for the nine carols and nine lessons service held on the day that he died.

In his retirement in Winchelsea, Michael was an active member of the local community. He was a freeman of the town. He sang with Winchelsea Singers, and he worked for 20 years as a volunteer at St Michael’s Hospice in St Leonards-on-Sea.

Michael was never one to push himself forward, in all things he sought cooperation and harmony, and that we should live in peace together. He leaves his wife, Barbara (aged 93); sons Gordon, Duncan, and Gavin; and four grandchildren.

Biography

General practitioner (b 1926; q Cambridge/London 1949), died from sepsis, kidney failure, and heart problems on 20 December 2017

The Reverend David Page compiled this obituary with the help of the McFadyean family.

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