

### **Michael Graham-Jones: An Appreciation.** Charles Handy 9.8.11

‘They don’t make them like that any more’. That was how Tom ended his toast to Michael at supper, the day after his death. I think that we would all agree. Michael was ‘old school’; he belonged to a more value-driven world, where life was an opportunity to make a difference to the lives of others. And Michael did make a difference, to many people in many ways. Most of us here can bear witness to that, and are here to give thanks for his life and for the good fortune that allowed our paths to cross with his. Someone once said that you can achieve anything in this world if you don’t try to claim credit for it. Michael, through others, had much to boast about but the thought of him boasting about anything, other than his grandchildren, is inconceivable.

I only found out only the other day, for example, that he had been mentioned in Despatches and awarded the Military MBE for gallantry in his war service in the Second World War. As a very young Captain in the Royal Corps of Signals, he had chased the Germans across Tunisia and Algeria and then over to Sicily and up through Italy past Monte Casino, working to keep the lines of communication open. No mobile phones then, just difficult and dangerous journeys. Although he did not talk much about the war to his children until relatively recently, all of them knew that he had learnt an enormous amount in the field of war and at Staff College in Jordan. His prowess as a driver, for example, was born out of hard experience and he loved it. The children, Susie told me, thought that he really wanted to be a rally driver.

Michael was born in Oxford, at 199 Woodstock Road, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1920, the second child of Dr. Jack and Aileen Graham-Jones. Jack was an orthopaedic surgeon who worked with Mr. Girdlestone and Lord Morris to develop what became the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre. Michael went to prep school at the Old Ride near Bournemouth, when his parents moved there from Oxford. Then there was Harrow, where he flourished musically under Henry Havergal; he enjoyed maths too, but was known as ‘stick-legs Jones’: no way was he athletic, though he did manage some cross-country running. As for the maths, his story was that Oriel interviewed him on his application to read maths there; interviewed him again; and eventually put him out of his misery by offering him a place, indeed an Exhibition, as the Briscoe-Owen Scholar, providing he agreed to read any subject other than maths. He read PPE, going there in 1939 along with his cousin Charles Kitchener. But his Oxford studies were not destined to last for long. There was a war starting and in 1940 Michael left Oxford to do his bit. He returned in 1945 when Oxford allowed returning ex-servicemen like him to complete their studies in just one more year. It must have been a busy year. Not only did he have to put two years’ study into one, but he also met Jennifer who, like him, was reading PPE. He got his War Degree and married Jennifer at the end of term, from Oriel in 1946.

Michael was left with an abiding affection for Oriel. Oriel was my college too, and after Jennifer’s death Michael, my wife Elizabeth and myself would make an annual visit of a Sunday evening to dine at High Table after chapel. It was clear on those occasions that Michael was in effect an honorary member of the Senior Common Room, where he was

always welcome and where he had also helped to initiate and fund a series of occasional champagne concerts, a very pleasing addition to college life.

After the honeymoon – a wonderful six-week ride around Europe in his lovely Delage motor car, in a world still empty of tourists – he started work, somewhat to Jen's dismay. He joined the Civil Service and worked in Nye Bevan's office in the Ministry of Health actually drafting parts of the NHS bill in 1948. Jennifer's restlessness encouraged him to move to the British Council where he worked for twelve years, in Iran, India and London. They were happy years, I think, doing interesting work in intriguing places, but a growing family meant that a permanent London base was needed. He joined Tyzack and Partners, a consulting firm in 1959, later taking over responsibility in the practice for their recruitment business.

It was there that I first met him, forty-five years ago. I was looking for a job. He had one to offer in Clarks, the shoe business. I went for an interview. After it was finished he took me downstairs and offered me a sherry while we talked of other more important matters. I went home and told my wife that I had met a rather special person. We must ask him and his family to lunch, I said. We did, they came, and we have been friends ever since. I didn't take the job in the end, but I had found Michael and that made all the difference.

Michael was for me, and I'm sure for many others, a wise mentor in time of uncertainty. At each crossroads in my life my wife would say, 'Go and talk to Michael.' It was not that he would ever offer me any advice but his gentle probing would get me to be clearer about what I wanted out of life and work. Above all he was interested, interested in me. That was precious. I think that it was that combination of genuine interest, courtesy and intellectual toughness that made him such an effective consultant, to organizations as well as individuals. Stephen Eeley remembers him describing himself, as 'the prune in the fruit salad' as he challenged what he felt was the mumbo jumbo of vague but well-meaning individuals in struggling third sector organizations and asked them, oh so politely, to get to the point. Susie remembers expostulating about 'the system' in its various forms. 'They' are making it impossible for us to get anything done, she would cry. Michael's beady eye would imply, wordlessly, that she specify what she was actually going to do about the problem, once she had had her whinge.

He was perfectly suited to the recruitment role that he had at Tyzacks, finding the right person for the right job, but after ten years there he found, I think, that the need to deliver an ever increasing profit for the organization stopped him from doing what he really wanted to do, which was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations in the voluntary sector. So he left and founded The Faculties Partnership. It was a nice idea – to use the part-time skills of academics and other professionals as consultants who, because they had other earnings, would be prepared to sell their time more cheaply. I was one of the 'faculty'. I fear that I didn't contribute much but the occasional gatherings of the 'faculty' which Michael arranged were always stimulating. However it was never going to be a financial success story and Michael's take home pay must have seriously dipped.

Luckily there was Jennifer, who speeded up her rather eccentric property development activity, ending up with what we thought was the mad idea of buying a rambling old house with huge garden on the edge of an Oxfordshire village. Of course we were wrong. The Limes, as you all know, has been a wonderful project, providing a welcoming home for all sorts, including needy friends, carers, and most recently Tom and his helpers, together with Ellen and her activities, as well as becoming a place of musical pilgrimage through the Music at The Limes concerts. Critically it also aims to be a self-sustaining commune.

Just as well, because Michael was unable to confine himself to the consulting role. He had to get involved, for free of course. The list of charities that Michael helped to found or develop included at one time or another, Christian Action, CORAT, The Sainsbury Trust, The Carr-Gomm Society, ACET, The Joseph Rowntree Trust, DePaul, Shelter, Radical Alternatives to Prison, the Phoenix Trust – and of course, the Abbey at Sutton Courtenay.

Meantime there was always fun as well as work. The countless drives through Europe to Sestri Levante, where Jennifer's parents held court every summer, the parties in Lower Belgrave Street, visiting the children and grandchildren, in America, Nepal, Kenya and Liverpool, keeping up with Sebastian's career in theatre, TV and film and, in recent years, visits to Aspall Hall where he had spent his childhood holidays and where his cousins still run the centuries-old cyder business. And many, many friends of all ages and sorts. Then, of course, there was the music. Michael loved classical music and knew it well. When he and Jennifer started their informal concerts at The Limes it was the start of a vivid tradition which still continues. All in all, it was, looking back, as full and rich a life as anyone could wish for.

But it was a life that got a little quieter when Jennifer became increasingly breathless, and Michael became a full-time carer for three years from 1999, until Jennifer died in 2002. Then Sebastian died two years after that, untimely, aged only 56. Michael fractured a hip just after a trip to Italy with Susie and immediately after one of the Oriel champagne concerts. Life was really never quite the same again. The last couple of years were tough, but Susie's constant loving care of him made his time as easy as it could be. Felix, too, came over from America when he could, to allow Susie some time to herself, but she was beside Michael at the end, as she had been for so long. Michael was fortunate indeed in his children. Largely thanks to Susie, Michael was Michael right to the end, just a little more tired. When I last saw him, some two weeks ago, I said how lucky Felix was to have had so much time alone with him that week. When my own father died, I said, he was unconscious by the time I reached him, so I never had that last conversation with him. There was a long pause, then Michael reached out and took my hand, 'I'm so sorry for you and your father' he said. He was still thinking of others not himself, right to the end. A good man, indeed a special man, a good life and a good death. We shall miss you Michael, my friend. But we all thank you for what you gave us.

Charles Handy .....9<sup>th</sup>. August 2011