

## David Mason 1919-2016

David Sidney Mason BSc MICE, my father, was born in 1919, into a different world from today, much more conservative and religious. He attended grammar school, and was then the first in the Mason family to go to university where he studied Civil Engineering

WWII meant that on leaving University, it was straight into the army and officer training. For many, war is a terrible thing, but for Dad it was a bit like a modern 18-30's holiday (or so he told us). Being an Officer in the Royal Engineers, and a semi-reserved profession, there was none of that dangerous stuff on the front line.

So he found himself in Italy: pleasant climate, a nice distance behind the front lines, rebuilding the bridges and roads that the Allies had destroyed to stop the Germans reinforcing their troops as they fought their way up Italy. So he would be billeted in a village, while they repaired a bridge or whatever.

Now as a good-looking English Officer, certain Italian ladies saw him as a good chance of improving their lot. But then he would be moved on and the exercise would be repeated again in the next village, although he did pick up a love of opera.

He met Joan, our mother, married, and together they produced four children, my sister and two brothers. We moved to Norwich in the late 50's, which remained the family home for many years.

Dad was now following the middle class dream, mortgage, kids at university, and at all times remaining a proper Dad.

He fell in love with Wales and we would holiday there at least three times a year, that love of Wales lasted all his life.

The first of four major tragedies then hit my father, the death of his fourth child, our brother Steve, but life went on. By this time Mum and Dad had returned from a contract in Kuwait and moved to London as he didn't feel ready to retire and had the opportunity to work as a consultant on a new project.

Mum had always been the healthy one out of the two, Dad was a 40 a day, untipped Players man. Then the bolt from the blue came, Mum had cancer, and the second tragedy of his life struck when, after it was thought to be cured, it returned and he found himself alone.

Back in the early 1970s Dad realised his children were having a good time at English Civil War re-enactments, came along to have a look and, being impressed with the free beer, decided to join. It was through English Civil War Society he met and married Anne, and a new chapter in his life began. Unfortunately the third tragedy struck when, at a Civil War 'do', they were both involved in a tragic caravan fire and Anne died, Dad was lucky to survive. Unbelievably, he picked himself up, started internet dating and met Betty, who became his third wife. Betty joined in with the ECWS and they travelled together extensively.

After leaving the Army, Dad moved into civil engineering, and in one of our chats he told me that he had achieved three personal great ambitions.

When at university two of the theoretical and unrealistic projects that they had to work on were designing a road bridge over the Severn Estuary and building a tunnel under the Channel, Dad achieved in real life both of these dreams. His third great achievement was playing a key design and build role in the Ninian oil platform, which was the largest floating structure ever made by man.

Dad was never famous, and never will be, but you will all have used the bridges he designed and built if you have travelled on British motorways and you have probably taken off on runways that he was in charge of constructing.

When Dad and Betty came to visit their grandchildren, Dad and I would often sit up over a scotch. By this time I had started my own business, and my own family and one of the

key moments that stands out in my mind is, when we were chatting one night, I had a strange feeling that we were equals; the father son relationship that you grow up with had changed – years later it changed again and I realised that our roles were reversing.

Then the fourth great tragedy of dad's life struck, after years of deteriorating physical health, he found himself trapped in a useless body. It was one thing he could not pick himself up from. He died on July 31 2016.

Dad leaves behind Betty his widow, his children, and grandchildren. On behalf of his children, their partners and his grandchildren I would like to say special thanks to Betty for the happiness she gave him in his twilight years, and especially the care and love she showed him until the very end.

MICHAEL MASON

## Neil Black 1932-2016



Born in Birmingham, Neil Black was the youngest of four children. His father was a successful radiologist and Neil grew up in affluent circumstances. He was sent to Rugby, studied history at Oxford after National Service, and then became a professional musician. Neil and his first wife Jill had three children (and four grandchildren), but it was after he married his second wife Jan, also a professional musician, that he moved to the Suburb.

Neil was a regular sight, standing in his bedroom window overlooking the path into Big Wood practising his oboe. We waved to each other in a friendly way for some time before meeting by his wheelie bin. And having no idea at all how renowned a musician he was, almost the first thing I said was, "I'm not really interested in classical music!"

So we didn't talk about that. Somehow wherever we met, in the middle of the wood, or in Temple Fortune with Neil on his way home from the fishmonger, or the gym, or one of the Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution Society lectures, we would stop and talk for ages.

I learned that as a child his favourite foods were asparagus and strawberries, that he stayed

up late at night watching the cricket, and how much he enjoyed chess. He talked about playing on music cruises, about working as a session musician with the Beatles (I don't think he was that impressed by John Lennon), about teaching master classes at the Saratoga music festival in Florida; did you know how bad air conditioning is for an oboe? And about Strathgarry in Perthshire where there was always far too much really good food on offer. I recommended my favourite books to him; he lent me Bridget Jones's Diary.

A quick trawl of the internet shows numerous CDs or downloads featuring Neil available to buy. Those he worked with include Daniel Barenboim, Pinchas Zukerman, Itzhak Pearlman, Murray Perahia and Sir Neville Martin. You might also say he worked with Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi, Handel, Vaughan Williams and Vila-Lobos.

Neil was a true gentleman. He always raised his hat to a lady and walked on the road side of the pavement. If ever I took my coat off he would offer to "hinder" me back into it. He was endlessly interested in almost everything. And a real friend. I miss him very much.

GEORGINA MALCOLM

Those who are really great, at the top of their profession, leaders in their field tend to be the most unassuming of people. You never get to know them until it's too late. That's how it was for me with Neil Black. Neil played the oboe, and he played it very well.

On numerous occasions the Free Church put together a small orchestra to support a choral work we were presenting and Neil always made himself available. Imagine my surprise when reading his obituary in The Times during last summer

when I discovered just how good he was. He played in the very best of professional orchestras; he was an immensely talented musician.

He lived amongst us, modestly, quietly and I for one am sorry I never really knew him for the talented individual that he was; but I will always be grateful that this supremely talented musician was prepared to play for us at the Free Church when we asked him. Most likely the most talented musician to have played there, and I for one will always be grateful.

IAN TUTTON

## Tim Neal 1924-2016



Tim Neal, an Honorary Member of the RA, died on 31st October aged 92, at his home in Meadway, Hampstead Garden Suburb, where he lived all his life. His parents bought the house – designed by the renowned arts and crafts architect MH Baillie Scott – in 1914, so the Neals were, and are, only the second owners. Next door lived the actor Robert Donat (commemorated by a blue plaque) and Tim recalled the crowds of fans who flocked to catch a sight of the star of The 39 Steps and other films. Tim had his own brief film career: in the Suburb he is perhaps best known for narrating the 1975 film about the Suburb, alongside Sir Donald Sinden, made to celebrate European Architectural Heritage Year.

After attending Bryanston School he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge. His studies in modern languages were interrupted by a spell in the RAF and although the War ended before he had finished his training he did not return to Cambridge until 1947. After taking his degree, he joined St Clement Danes School, then situated in Hammersmith, and rose to become the Head of the Modern Languages Department. He was the most senior member of the Garden Suburb

Theatre, having joined its predecessor society the Play and Pageant Union in 1950. His first role was in the open air production of Love's Labour's Lost in the Little Wood Open Air Theatre in 1951 and after that, like so many young men in drama groups, he was much in demand to play parts. He particularly enjoyed the outdoor shows and will always be remembered for his performance as the Judge in Toad of Toad Hall in 1973. In later life he was also an active member of the Fellowship and even after he had retired from the stage continued to display his theatrical talents in their regular play readings.

He had a great love of railways, making many journeys around the UK and across Europe, sometimes combining this with another of his great loves, that of ornithology.

He was for many years a member of the HGS Residents Association Council and the first chairman of its Trees and Open Spaces Committee, to which he brought his deep knowledge of nature and the environment.

With his passing the Suburb has lost one of its longest standing residents whose links stretch back to the early days of the Suburb.

COLIN GREGORY

## Letter to the editor

Heathgate, NW11

Sir,  
Have you noticed the new habit at the top of Heathgate and on the west side of South Square of leaving green and sometimes other bins

obstructing the pavement all the time? Would the RA stop this blight and potential danger to passers-by in the central part of the Garden Suburb?

(Name and address withheld)



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