

# Team Talk TRIBUTE



August 2010

## Sixty Years Ministry

At the beginning of July in 1940, aged only 14, **Graham Stokes** heard Wing Commander Jack Little preach the gospel and specifically quote Paul's words from Romans 6:23 - for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jack Little was shot down over Berlin three years later, but he had played a significant part in the life of our family. Dad was very clearly and, as we used to say, very soundly converted. His family moved to Egham a fortnight later and he joined the **King's Own Bible Class** at a certain Bishopsgate Evangelical Church, where the guidance and influence of Chas James was to prove hugely important.

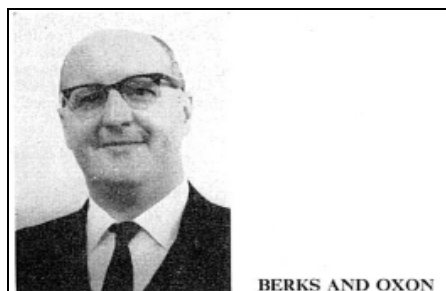
Late in 1943 he joined the **Royal Marines** and served on the HMS Anson, travelled widely, until early 1947.

From 1947-1949 he worked as a journalist for a local paper. It was in 1945, steaming back to the UK at the end of the War, Graham received a very powerful call from God to be an evangelist and joined the **Open Air Mission** in 1949. It was a date that they remembered with gratitude and humility every year.



In 1950 he married Margaret who, shared his passion for following and proclaiming Christ. Megan was born in 1952 and Bruce arrived in 1955.

Megan writes, "Later that year, Graham was preaching at Ascot Races with other evangelists from the Open Air Mission when lightning struck the railings around the race course and two men preaching were killed outright. Dad was knocked unconscious for quite some hours, with pepper marks all down his back and his memory affected for some years. He would have to read his sermons from a script, following the words with his finger in case he suddenly forgot where he was up to, or even where he was."



Mr. G. H. Stokes

1965 was a most encouraging season. Tent missions were held in Maidenhead and Watchfield. We saw evidences of the Lord's blessing in many ways and in a number of lives. To witness the reality of salvation coming to people is great joy. Two valuable weeks with open air children's meetings in local parks in Reading proved useful. One was a time of valuable sowing and the other of vital reaping. The public meetings held at Oxford Fair were very blessed. Souls were saved and some backsliders restored. We saw also the hand of the Lord at work in many other lives. We were tremendously encouraged to realise that through the continuity of such witness over the years people come back again and again. The Lord caused the wrath of man to praise Him, as the opposition to have our witness stopped was crushed. Instead we had a better site and better service from the Police than ever before.

from 'Counties Newsletter' when Graham was COUNTIES Evangelist Berks & Oxon 1960 - 1968

"Dad being away on missions became a part of our childhood experience. Mum and Dad would write daily (we are talking pre-household phones) and Bruce and I would send our little practice notes. It was a way of life for Mum, waiting

with love and assurance that Dad was away doing God's work that she became very familiar with and those feelings of faith and hope and assurance are with her now.

Mr Mansergh was what we used to call 'a gentleman of the road'. I don't know where Dad originally met him, but he was a regular part of my childhood, and growing up, when he would appear unannounced on the doorstep and declare that he had come for my holiday'. So he would stay for a few days, share our meals, our family chat, walking the dog etc. Once, he arrived at Christmas time because I remember crocheting him a tie. Mum made sure that ours was always an open home."

According to Bruce, Graham was always an evangelist at heart. "He could strike up conversations with total strangers. He was very deferential to those with rank in society, but not so much that he lost the common touch. And when we talked about modern church life, we both used to talk with regret about the triumph of style over substance and technique over godliness - one of the last books he read was nicely entitled *This little church went to market!*"

Reflecting Graham's support for Watford Football Club, Bruce described Graham's legacy: WFC!

**A WRETCHED MAN!** - not perfect; not a great listener; *obsessional about time; a very private man and he liked to torment people!* I say "a wretched man" because dad would not have wanted me using euphemisms (Cromwell - Paint me as I am, warts and all). And he was always clear that he was an object of grace.

**A FAITHFUL MAN:** *60 years on, his love for Margaret was undiminished. She supported dad in his work, put up with long absences, cared diligently for Megan and me, and provided the attentiveness to others that balanced dad's drivenness. And to his credit, dad always recognised that.*

**A COMPELLING MAN:** *My abiding image of dad was that of the preacher. He always prepared carefully and always delivered passionately. His sermons were littered with anecdotes, and he could move you from laughter to tears.*

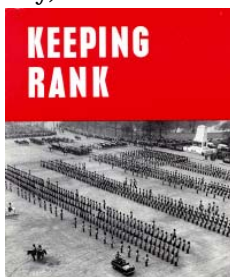
*In his final words to Meg and me he wrote far more eloquently than I ever will: "We shall meet again in heavenly country. The air is good, just like we loved it at Walmer; the company better; there is nothing to impair and the King Himself is there. I salute you, my children. Finish your course with joy."*

### **TRIBUTES FROM COUNTIES**

We enjoyed Graham's preaching and teaching nearly 60 years ago, and came to love him when he became the Berks & Oxon evangelist when I was his Secretary and Phil Charters his Chairman on the Regional Fellowship. As an ex-journalist, Graham had that happy knack of putting words together well, both spoken and written, and was the unidentified 'Countyman' editing the early Counties newsletters (see 2 covers on this page). Some may recall the hilarious sketches he wrote and performed 'How NOT to evangelise'. In all of this time he never lost his sharp sense of humour, even when my mother described him as 'that lovely man with a wide parting'!

A man of tremendous ability, courage and genuine warmth for everyone he met, he was the means of leading many to Christ and of possibly even more to become active in the Lord's work. There is no better example of one to whom it could be said, 'Well

done, good and faithful servant'.  
(David Jolley)



*While with Counties in his earlier days, Graham edited the Counties magazine, as journalism had been his first trade. During Graham's stint with SASRA, as part of my North Devon ministry, I was Scripture Reader for R.A.F. Chivenor and was supposed to call him Sir!!*

*While Madge and I were in Canada in 1983 for two months ministry, we spend a few days with them and ministered at their Church in Penticton for 2/3 days. Graham also did some radio broadcasting and work among the Canadian Forces.*

*He was in the Royal Marines and made much use of his connections therewith. From Kent, Graham returned to Devon on an annual basis for a few weeks' ministry, where I last saw him and Margaret.*

*(Dennis Pierce)*

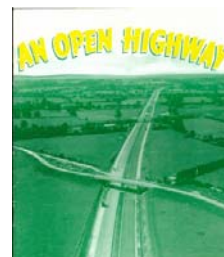
**The marines are renowned for their discipline and courage** and I think that these were qualities that Graham frequently displayed in his evangelistic ministry.

For many years he was an open air preacher and one of his particular loves was to preach every year with a team of evangelists at the famous Oxford Fair. He became well known to both the general public and the fairground people and in fact preached for a number of years at their annual service which was attended by many hundreds of travelling folk. He was joined in the Oxford outreach by Ken Brighton who succeeded him as the Counties evangelist in Berks and Oxon.

Graham was a pioneer evangelist and never had any fear of talking to people

he met about his Saviour- the kind of man that was at ease in any company that he found himself. He summarised his own life in this way: the Marines who made me, the *Mission* that moulded me, *Margaret* who mellowed me.

Graham and I shared a keen interest in rugby and cricket and in his letters and conversation he always had something positive to say about Welsh rugby and Glamorgan cricket which was often great consolation! (Ron Davies)



**It has been a privilege** to spend short times with Graham and Margaret over the last 18 months or so as we called to encourage them at Walmer. He was always very welcoming and precise in all he did, with a real burden to share the good news about the Lord Jesus in as many places as he could.

Graham was committed to supporting various fellowships, although this meant a lot of driving at times and was not easy for health reasons. It was hard to find out his 'special prayer needs' as he was a rather private man and more concerned about others than himself.  
(Lionel and Mavis Clargo)

**I met Graham when I preached at Shrewsbury Gospel Hall in 2000.** He took me to one side at the end of the service, telling me that he wasn't sure whether it was a word from the Lord, before proceeding to encourage me in my gifting and to seek the Lord's will and invited me to visit him at home for further discussion and prayer. At the time I had no thought about becoming a 'full time' Christian worker, but his encouragement and comments planted a seed which took some time to germinate before I finally joined Counties. (David Brown)