Welcome everyone.

It is a sad reflection of our lives that it is only after the person passes that we learn and recall long forgotten details of their lives and our connections. Don is no exception to that. Suky and Annemarie have recounted earlier about his upbringing and what he achieved, and I would like to add some personal perspectives from family and friends.

It would have taken some courage to marry when the bride came with 3 young daughters, all of whom had had a very difficult few years after her first husband left them. It wasn’t all one way, as they had to acclimatise to a pathologically grumpy basset hound!

I give thanks and deny all responsibility for all the contributed reminiscences. Sadly there really is not enough time to include all of them. I also will try not to repeat the earlier tribute!

It was at **Grove Farm – Warwickshire** , a rural house at the end of a very long drive that I first met Don some 45 years ago. Ironically he was a partner in setting up his eldest daughter on a blind date at the local Farmer’s Hunt Ball. It never occurred to me that he would only have been about 44 at the time. So, with hindsight, just how remarkable was it that he had worked his way up the ladder to such a senior position at RHM at such an early age?

With the girls maturing, it was inevitable that boys came on the scene. A very trying time for both father and boyfriends. Annemarie’s misfortune was to be the icebreaker in that direction.

It is fair to say that Don was a blunt speaking Yorkshireman. As such, he might never have been suited as one of Her Majesty’s diplomats, and he was quite intimidating to young men.

Don’s tolerance was all the more surprising given that I was unemployed and living in a caravan behind a pub at the time!

Tolerance perhaps made easier by ready involvement in various projects around the extensive outbuildings. One such project involved the demolition of a large concrete ramp, to be achieved by him swinging a heavy sledgehammer whilst I held a large chisel. The medical treatment was good, and there was no lasting damage, but forgiving the girls took a bit longer once they mentioned that he was nearly blind in one eye! Suky tells that he also had her holding fence posts whilst he sought to drive them into the ground with the back of an axe!

It has to be said that the household revolved around horses and hunting as well as his work. Starting his day very early, he was to be found bustling around the yard, and with almost military precision for hunting days. Plaiting manes, cleaning tack, and dealing with the muddy aftermath. Some days could be really quite tense!

Precision extended into the household. Woe betide anyone who failed to cut a slice off a loaf that was not absolutely square and of totally uniform thickness!

It was at Grove Farm that Don started brewing home-made wine and beer on a near industrial scale, with varying degrees of success. The good was indeed good, but success was far from guaranteed! Sometimes it came at a price. Collection of dandelions was not a favourite pastime of the girls, who likened it to exploitation of child labour! It wouldn’t have been quite so reluctant had the end result been drinkable!

By contrast, apparently, during his tenure as Church Warden at Honiley church, he invited his fellow warden back for a homemade beer. With only evensong to allow for, the beer stretched to 3, rendering both of them incapable for evensong!. This was extraordinarily poor behaviour for such a punctual and dutiful person. Subsequent checking determined that the alcohol content was the same as sherry!

He was also an optimist, something amply demonstrated by trying to teach Cherry and Annemarie about cricket on separate visits to matches at Edgbaston!

Another melding of family and horses came with the annual holiday. Taken in Yorkshire, (where else), Evelyn and the girls complete with horses and Jasper the basset, were transported north to enjoy times of riding, walking and visits to pubs. ‘Enjoy’ might have been an exaggeration for some with regard to the riding!

Don’s attention to detail was near perfect, but mistakes can occasionally happen! I was told that during his time in charge of a retail bakery shop chain, he prided himself on having the displays ‘just right’, only to find himself in one branch where things were less than perfect to his mind. He duly roasted the manager, not a pleasant experience for the recipient, and left the shop. Only then did he realise it was actually one of his competitor’s branches!

The first notable achievement of the move to **Oakwood Farm - Beenham** was leaving his eldest daughter behind! He and Evelyn soon settled in to this lovely old house set in fields at the edge of the village, which included a wood. Once again, the horses had to approve of their new accommodation!

I offer a quote from one of his hunting friends:

*“He was a hunting stalwart and came out in all weathers. He jumped just about anything on Paddy Paddington and was still on board on the other side (most of the time!) He was always cheerful and I never knew him to be of bad humour. He was very objective and rational and considered in his advice, although he never gave it to me unless asked. A rare attribute and he will be sadly missed by his pals.*

It was at this time that Don took up Team Chasing, a major test of both horse and rider. For those who don’t know of this, it is a madcap race for a team of 4 unhinged riders against the clock around a brutal cross-country course. Definitely not for the faint hearted.

Life included close involvement in the local church with Don as a Church Warden, and Evelyn as the organist. She honoured us with playing us in at our wedding. It was a very joyful and generous occasion, dispelling the traditional carefulness of Yorkshire folk, (and doubly so now we learn of his presumed Scottish ancestry). Later on, the other 2 sisters also married and moved away.

Now retired, hunting could be attended to several days a week, uncontaminated by the inconvenience of work.

In the late 90’s, Don and Evelyn moved to **Shuttles Cottage in South Leigh**. A lovely old thatched house, it had a large garden and paddocks for the horses. The immaculate colourful garden was a source of great pleasure for them both, and Don would be out very early in the morning tending it. Evelyn’s joy was the new swimming pool, enjoyed by much of the family. By this time, 5 grandchildren were on the scene, a source of fun and some challenges.

Hunting continued to be a key interest, not without incident, as mentioned in a lovely email from his retired doctor. “*He was often at the surgery after his numerous falls while out hunting and I got to know him well. Always good humoured and with a twinkle in his eye, and not knowing him before he and Evelyn retired to South Leigh, I would never have guessed that he was a captain of industry! A good raconteur, he was always fun to meet at Probus, even as his health was visibly failing.”*

Don maintained a thriving vegetable garden – visiting family never came away empty handed and usually with a carrier bag full of vegetables dug up only minutes earlier.

The garden came with a huge **hedge**! It was an absolute monster! At around 10 ft high, trimming involved wobbling unsteadily on a stepladder, not surprisingly terrifying his wife and family. It was the first sign of his advancing years when he gave up hunting and eventually was persuaded to stop his hedge trimming around the same time.

Don very kindly gave grand-daughter Kate his last great hunter, Siggy. It was a wonderful finish to many happy days of riding together.

The succession of his **Bassetts** started with Jasper. It has to be said that he was not the most sociable of dogs, and terrorised most of the family. Don and Evelyn, in a masochistic decision, became rescuers for the breed. Clearly others had found the dogs could be a trial and so rehoming them was a task. The last of the line for Don was Polly, his walking companion in recent years. Sadly, with her passing, Don’s inclination to go out for walks was never the same after.

Polly will also be remembered for getting banned from the local pub thanks to her old age bladder weakness!

Not being a **bridge** player, my understanding is that patience and guile as well as a telepathic level of communication with one’s partner are the hallmarks of great players. It has to be said that these are not the usual traits of straight speaking Yorkshiremen, as Evelyn would have been the first to admit. Yet they participated happily for many years in the local club.

Happy times, marred then by Evelyn’s long illness and eventual passing. It was a very sad time for the whole family, and Don’s wish to move afterwards was easily understood.

It would be a lonely transition to a new house in **Orchard Close** after such a loss, but thankfully he was surrounded by good neighbours, and he maintained contact with his friends. One such friend from the bridge club was Valery. Their friendship grew, and one day whilst on a trip to Bruges, Don very nervously explained to Annemarie that he now had a lady friend. Meeting her for the first time, we were very pleased that he had such a bright companion who was able to keep her Yorkshireman in his place! Together, they explored many parts of England and stayed in some beautiful places.

We are all so grateful to Valery for her love for Don, and for making him very happy again. She has become part of our family, and will always remain so.

Don’s passing is truly an end of a long era for the family. Looking back over his life, one is struck by just how much he achieved so quietly. His generation was one where people really could start at the bottom and work their way up to the top. It was one where there was such real hardship in their early years, and nothing could be taken for granted. Don’s story is one to be amazed at and be thankful for, his marriage to Evelyn with the girls, his horses, his gardening, Valery and of course, his friends.

Thank you Don, and may God bless you.

Could I ask you to please raise your glasses and let us toast his memory:

To Don