

Eulogy for Charles “Alfred” Gallagher (1912-2011)



Alfred was a quiet, shy man with a huge heart and a tireless work ethic. He had talents and qualities in abundance.

He was only 13 years old when his father died, and so his childhood was cut short when he and his brother Paul suddenly had to shoulder the responsibilities of supporting the family. This early tragedy undoubtedly helped shape his character.

Alfred was a self-taught man and continued to study and learn new skills throughout his life. He gained certificates and qualifications in typing, shorthand, mathematics, trigonometry, algebra, electrical engineering, plumbing, draughtsmanship, and other subjects. His academic prowess made him something of a sage amongst his peers.

He was an accomplished church organist and pianist, and he would also enjoy attending occasional organ recitals at St Mary Redcliffe.

He was an avid photographer throughout his life, and his legacy of photographs provides a valuable record of our family's past.

He was a pioneer in the early days of motoring and learned the skills to maintain his own motorcycle and cars. When I was about seven years old, I remember watching in awe and fascination as he rebuilt the engine on our 1934 Vauxhall car.

His years in the army as a Quartermaster Sergeant taught him to be a meticulous record keeper. He kept records of almost everything, including a log-book of every single journey that he ever took in each of his cars, with mileage, fuel and oil used. His record-keeping skills enabled him to jump straight into a second career, after his retirement from Rolls-Royce at age 64. This time it was accounting, working for the businesses of his son-in-law, Mike, and of his next-door neighbours' son, Denis.

But first and foremost, Alfred was a doting husband and family man. He never drank or smoked, but invested most of his waking hours in his family. When he wasn't at work, he was at home helping with the family chores, or gardening, or doing repairs or improvements about the house. He took an active part in rearing his young children and would supervise bath-night on Saturday evening and read us stories at bedtime. He was strict about homework getting done, but always found time to help and explain things.

He was very keep-fit and health conscious. While at Rolls Royce, he would normally cycle the three-miles to work, rather than use the car. He continued his daily exercises, or physical jerks as he called them, right up to the end.

He had dogged determination, as his friends, Terry and Joyce, recall. While Alfred and Hazel were in Terry's car one day, Alfred asked if Terry would take a detour via Asda so he could look at French cheeses. Hazel was surprised and said "but you only like Cheddar cheese". However, Alfred kept insisting, so Terry drove them to Asda. After looking over the French cheeses, and without buying anything, Alfred said he was now ready to go. On the way home, Hazel was becoming more and more irate at Alfred's strange behaviour and refusal to explain himself, until he finally admitted: "I needed to finish the crossword and the last clue was 'French Cheese'".

Alfred's DIY skills were legendary. Combined with his dogged-determination, he would take on the most daunting of tasks that others would not even attempt, such as single-handedly replacing the roof on his Belmont Road house, and designing and building an extension to double the size of his Portishead home. His DIY accomplishments were inspirational to many, but particularly his children, to the point that Mike always thought of his father as Pop, P-O-P, which summarises his teachings: Preparation, Organisation, and Perfection.

Alfred was fascinated with science and technology. He collected many science books, he listened to science broadcasts on the radio, and he even attended science lectures at the Colston Hall.

He was also very resourceful. I recall one time when he needed to dispose of some bricks from a wall he had knocked down. He would place the bricks a few at a time, into Hazel's shopping trolley, wait until after dark, then wheel them to a builder's skip that was parked a few roads away. His niece, Clare, has never forgotten how Alfred could extract a quart from a pint pot. When the marmalade jar was empty, he would still manage to scrape enough for three more slices of toast. Then, the empty jar would be recycled as a container for his nuts and bolts.

Alfred never forgot a birthday or anniversary and his children and grandchildren and others would receive a cheque with their birthday cards and Christmas cards. His grand-daughter Victoria recalls that when she used to visit her grandparents, Grandma would give her 20 pounds and say "Don't tell Granddad", and then Granddad would take her aside and say "Here is an extra 20 pounds, but don't tell Grandma".

He was incredibly selfless and generous towards his family, extended family, friends and neighbours. He was always willing to give his time to help with repairs or taxi rides or homework or whatever. Denis reminded me of how he used to come to our house in the evenings for tutoring by Alfred in mathematics and algebra. He claims it was Alfred's help that enabled him to pass his GCE exams. When the building society wouldn't give a mortgage to his daughter Viv, Alfred loaned her his retirement savings, so she could buy the house of her dreams. His grandchildren, Andrew and Charlotte, remember him as a wonderful piano teacher who sparked their passions for creating music, with hours of patient tutoring in Alfred's famous Portishead music room.

Alfred was the 'rock' that so many of us depended upon. Clare said that Uncle Alfred was the only person that she could trust to get her to the station on time after her wedding reception, and to keep the escape plan secret.

Husband, father, brother, grandfather, great grandfather, uncle, great uncle, and faithful friend, he leaves a gaping hole in our lives that can never be filled.