

# Anne and Bill Barbour

## A Report of the Celebration of their Lives

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### FRIENDS TRAVEL HUGE DISTANCES TO PAY RESPECTS TO MUCH-LOVED COUPLE

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Guests who paid tributes to the late Bill and Anne Barbour are from left, Tom Noble, Integrated College; John Maxwell, Robert Northridge, Portora; James Barbour, son of the late Bill and Anne Barbour, Billy Dixon, Royal British Legion and Eric Bullick, Alliance.<<

THEY touched countless lives with their kindness, wisdom, selflessness and enthusiasm to help others.

Combined with their devotion to one and other, Bill and Anne Barbour were loved and adored by many.

And when the couple tragically died last year their sad passing sent shock waves around the county.

Anne Barbour, suffering from the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease, was found dead at the family home on the Sligo Road in Enniskillen.

A postmortem found she had died from suffocation. The body of her husband Bill, a former teacher at Portora Royal School, was recovered from Rossole Lough. He had drowned himself.

After their deaths it was learnt that the couple had an agreement to end their lives if Mrs. Barbour's Alzheimer's disease got "too degrading".

And as their poignant last picture (kindly donated by their family) shows, the couple were together to the very end.

After their private funeral at Roselawn Crematorium in Belfast in November, their family sought ways to hold some sort of public event to allow those that knew them well the opportunity to pay their own respects.

And so a fitting celebration of Bill and Anne's lives took place at the Erne Integrated College in Enniskillen at the weekend, arranged by principal (and Bill's former pupil) Tom Noble.

"Friends of Anne and Bill have travelled huge distances from places like Cork, Scotland and England. I welcome the many who have come from so many professional, civic, educational and political

backgrounds. We are here to celebrate the lives of two very special people who we all love and whose lives have inspired all of us in so many unique ways." he said.

Bill, a firm supporter of integrated education worked tirelessly with others to secure such an establishment in Enniskillen.

"He once told me about an unannounced visit he made to the Ulster Bank in Donegal Square in Belfast in 1993. He asked for the manager and said: "I'd like to borrow £4 million pounds to set up a new integrated school in Enniskillen." So then a somewhat bemused manager said: "Let's go out for lunch." While Bill didn't go away with the cash in his pocket, he certainly paved the way in negotiating a series of bank loans which enabled this school to become established," said Mr. Noble.

John Maxwell joined Bill in campaigning for the introduction of an integrated movement in Fermanagh.

"After the Remembrance Day bomb in Enniskillen in 1987, a group called Enniskillen Together was formed, whose aim was to try and bridge the political and religious divide. A sub committee was formed to examine the possibility of developing an integrated education sector as part of the education system in Fermanagh. Bill was an enthusiastic member of this group," he said.

Mr. Maxwell also recounted a humorous tale while a student at Portora Royal School.

"I have a particular memory of a certain rugby match when Bill was the referee. These house matches often tended to be bad tempered, somewhat vicious affairs and this one was no different. At one point a fight broke out among the forwards in a ruck, followed by a shout: "For God's sake get off me or I'll\*\*\*\*" - more profanity which I'll not repeat. Thereupon there was a very loud blast on a whistle, followed by complete silence while we waited to see what Bill would do - and expecting at the very least to be severely reprimanded. After a pause which seemed to go on forever, Bill said very quietly "I'm afraid the Lord cannot be much help to you in this situation." Both teams dissolved in laughter and a potentially difficult situation was diffused. This was typical of Bill's way of handling difficulties and I learnt a lesson that day," he laughed.

Other tributes came from Mr. Barbour's former colleagues. Robert Northridge, deputy principal at Portora Royal School, Billy Dickson, chairman of the Fermanagh branch of the Royal British Legion and Alliance party member Eric Bullick.

Bringing the service to a close, the couple's eldest son James explained how he and his family were overwhelmed by the shock and the suddenness of their deaths. Looking back at their lives, Mr. Barbour said he thought his parents were "immensely fortunate".

"Their views on several matters were not widely shared in Enniskillen but people made space for them, and respected their hard work and good intentions, and agreed to differ. They had many friends and did not seem to make enemies. And they loved the setting in which they found themselves; the countryside of Fermanagh. On foot, on bicycles, by car and by rowing boat, their delight was exploring Fermanagh's wild places, and they passed that delight on to us, their children," he said.

Forty-seven years ago, Bill bought the old National School at Topped Mountain Lough and gradually rehabilitated it as a dwelling.

"He and mother dreamed of moving to live there year round, but in the end did not do so. Possibly there was some early intimation of Mother's Alzheimer's disease - and many years into retirement, they eventually sold the property," explained James.

"Mother's Alzheimer's disease progressed slowly but relentlessly, and as the years went by, she lost the ability to converse sensibly. But they continued in great companionship because of their love of the open air, and they worked away steadily at their garden, and walked daily, except in the worst weather.

"Mother's progressive loss of mental capacity was a heavy and increasing burden, but for a very long time they were able to adapt their lives so that they could still be happy. Their love and guidance is treasured by four children and ten grandchildren. They had the privilege of rearing their family in what

still seems to me close to the best possible setting for doing this. The community around them accepted them, and they in turn served that community, and things they did have helped to strengthen it and make it better able to face the future. And they were able to live independently and privately as a couple till their very last evening. They are much missed, but theirs were full lives, lives to be celebrated," he said.

### Web address

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