

## **Bernard McStay (1939-49)**

**Born 25th March 1931, died 28th December 2020, aged 89.**

Bernard McStay was born and brought up in the Whickham area of Newcastle in 1931; son of John Henry McStay and Mary, nee Richardson. He attended RGS Junior and Senior Schools between 1939 and 1949.

Bernard started the RGS in September 1939 just as WWII broke out. He was soon evacuated with the school to Penrith, Cumbria; initially staying in a smaller house on Wordsworth Street with the younger boys. In later years he was moved to a larger house in Yanwath just outside Penrith, still present to this day; which was owned by a local colonel. Many a tale was told by my father of the things they got up to in Penrith... climbing out of the skylight and sliding down the 3rd floor roof to then shimmy down the drain pipes. Apparently, they could see the Head Master from here if he was on the toilet but they never seemed to get caught. They had lessons in Penrith, not far from the present George Hotel (where until recent years the evacuees returned annually). Dad described walking in and out of the local military camps, picking up old tank shells, and even sitting in a Spitfire that was unguarded. He enjoyed the swimming lessons in the local River Eamont.

Bernard swam for the RGS Newts, specialising in backstroke, which was always his favoured stroke in the years that followed. He remained proud of his photo hanging up in the Old Swimming Baths entrance, but never understood why he was given a middle name initial on the photo! He aspired to medicine and joined what was called the Medics 6th in those days. (No such thing in my day, just arts and science). Having completed A-levels, Bernard was a year young to start university and so did his national service. This was with the RAF, based in Wiltshire 1949-51; where he trained in electronics and radiocommunications. Subsequently, he studied medicine 1951-56 at what was then known as the University of Durham Medical School at King's College Newcastle (which became Newcastle Medical School in 1963). Following qualification, Dad was an anatomy demonstrator for a time amongst other jobs. In 1961 he married Cath as well as starting in General Practice in Wallsend, Newcastle. They had three children, Deborah, Kevin and Jonathan. Meanwhile, Dad also became the GP to the Tyne Tunnel building initiative from the mid 1960s to 1967. His subsequent M.D. (1/1/72) described the compression and decompression effects that the labourers were exposed to whilst working at high atmospheric pressures. He also enjoyed a weekly role as clinical assistant in Paediatrics at one of the local hospitals in North Shields.

In 1978 Bernard suffered a horrendous, life changing car crash. He was always a man of great determination and despite the multiple transfusions, injuries and operations he returned to General Practice after only 4 months. The physical consequences affected his walking but not his resolve for patients. Indeed, he would return to enjoying hill walking in the Lakes and swimming. He moved to live in Beadnell in 1989 following separation and eventual divorce. His passion for patients in Wallsend continued, until he finally retired in 2002, aged 72. In his later years he enjoyed painting, French classes and his daily routine of reading The Telegraph, and spending time with his good friend Barbara who survives him.

Bernard became increasingly frail and developed dementia in his latter years; yet remained living alone, fiercely independent until the final six weeks. He died in Hexham General Hospital on 28th December 2020, as a result of the aforementioned dementia and frailty.

He leaves his three children; as well as four grandchildren to Kevin: Anna, Sam, Josh and Nathan, as well as two great grandchildren, Faith and Levi; and two grandchildren to Jonathan: Isaac and Ben.

Kevin C. McStay (1973-83)