June Margaret Walker, née Bottrill
1935-2025





June with little sister Ruth

It is with sadness that I have to report the passing of my cousin June Walker, nee Botrill. June was born in Blackley, North Manchester, but lived most of her early life in Whitefield. In 1945, just after the end of World War 11, she attended Bury Grammar School For Girls and was joined by her sister Ruth 7 years later, along with two of her cousins, Susan Pearse (1955) and David Pearse, (1959). Just before Ruth was born, she was sent to live with relatives as she had contracted chickenpox. Whilst staying there one of her aunts, a Sunday school headmistress, gave her a copy of the Church magazine which featured an article about Africa. This fascinated June and she always claimed in later life that from this moment on, she decided that she wanted to live in Africa.

At the age of 16, she met a boy from BGS Boys' School called Brian Lomax Walker. He was two years older and his closest friend at that time was the highly respected former BGS Schoolmaster Geoff Bennett. June loved her days at Bury and was a bright student. After success with her O & A Levels she was accepted into Nottingham University and graduated with a degree in Chemistry, whilst Brian went off to undertake his National Service. With the benefit of his CCF training at Bury. Brian was commissioned as a lieutenant in the 2nd King's African Rifles, serving in Malaya. On completing his National Service, Brian returned home and completed a one year Colonial Office conversion course at Cambridge University for Army Officers. He and June were subsequently posted to Nyasaland where he supervised the Independence operations leading to the formation of the new country of Malawi He stayed on at the invitation of the new President, Dr Hastings Banda, agreeing to take on the role of Secretary to the President and June taught chemistry and history in the local schools. For his work, Brian was awarded the MBE

June and Brian remained in Malawi for the rest of their lives and became much loved and respected citizens. Life following on from independence was not easy and political turbulence and economic problems created great hardships, made even worse by the AIDS epidemic which swept through this part of Africa during the late 1980s and 90s. This devastated the adult population with over 10% of the population understood to have been infected. June, a deeply religious person worked hard alongside many charities including Save The Children, to provide assistance to affected families. She was ordained a deacon in The Anglican Church and

continued teaching in local schools. To help local people create income to support their families, June introduced them to the art of tie dying fabrics and various other crafts. She also promoted the principles of "Permaculture" within Malawi to encourage respect for the environment and sustainable local food production. Her work in this field over many years made her a much loved and highly respected citizen, earning her the sobriquet of ***"Gogo"***, a term or endearment and respect in the local language of Chichewa, reserved for older wise people, and especially those who took over the responsibility for bringing up children in the absence of parents. Indeed at her funeral, huge numbers of people attended, many of whom recounted their own personal experiences of being helped by June in their formative years. The funeral itself resembled a state occasion with traditional African dancing and choirs in full tribal dress.

Although most of June's long life was spent in Malawi, she was always very proud of her Lancastrian roots and particularly her old School. Although far from Bury, her love and fond memories of the times at her old school never waned and she constantly referred to her affection for BGS. As a mark of their love and affection for June, her coffin was prepared and decorated by the local people. At one end of her coffin was The Red Rose of Lancashire, whilst at the other, was the school crest of Bury Grammar School.

June and Brian leave behind three sons, all born in Malawi. Although living most of her adult life in Africa, June was very much part of a huge family, her mother being the second of 14 children whose families have spread to all corners of the globe. Many of this extended family enjoyed the privilege of watching the funeral celebrations via a live video link from June's family home at Thanthwe, Malawi

David W. Pearse



June's Form 1952 (June-Front row end right)



MBE At Buckingham Palace



Last photo of June and her coffin with BGS Crest & Red Rose