

Harry Watson Summers



1 February 1943 – 15 October 2019

Members of the Alexandria Burns Club, the local community and indeed many people from places much further afield were shocked and saddened to hear of the death of past president Harry Summers. Harry passed away suddenly while on holiday in Cascais, Portugal.

Harry was a war baby, born in Balshagray Hospital in Glasgow on 1 February 1943 to James and Ada Summers. His father came home to Dalvait Road in Balloch on Christmas Day 1945 after being demobbed in Italy after the war. That was the first time that Harry met his father.

James was a schoolteacher and also a well-known political activist. Suffice to say that his activism was not on behalf of the Tories. Harry was thus raised in a household where politics was a regular part of discussion. He attended Jamestown Primary School and then the Vale of Leven Academy, where he excelled and became the first head boy. Outside of his studies Harry was in the Boy's Brigade and, like most kids of that era, keen on football.

During the late 1950s he became a keen member of the Loch Lomond Amateur Rowing Club. Indeed he helped to rebuild the club, both metaphorically and literally, in the 1970's. He was part of the club in these halcyon days when it produced World champions, Olympians and Scottish and British champions. Harry also created lifelong friendships, across the globe, through the rowing club.

When he left secondary school he moved on to study history at Glasgow University, where he immersed himself in student life, moving into a student flat in Corunna Street, Finnieston. After graduating his first job was at Stewart's and Lloyd's in Glasgow. He had actually turned down the Glasgow Herald offer of a leader writer's job on the paper because it was too right wing. Most

people would attribute this to his father's influence. It may well have been but Harry was very much his own man. Those who knew him well are aware that he was certainly not incapable of forming and holding his own opinions about anything!

In 1964, before his studies were finished, Harry married his childhood sweetheart, Marjory McGregor. They had met at the Vale of Leven Academy and their first date was to see Dunkirk, the 1950's version, at The Strand cinema in Alexandria in 1958. They were inseparable from then on. They settled in Vinicombe Street, in Glasgow's West end. Their eldest son, Andrew, was born just over one year later followed by Gordon, who arrived three years later.

After leaving Uni Harry built a very successful career in business. His next job required a move down South, to Windsor, where he stayed until the early 1970s, returning to work in Glasgow and his new home in Smollett Street in his beloved Vale of Leven. He worked very successfully in sales, a role that led him into another job in the early 1980s with Tandem Computers, which was then the fastest-growing public company in America.

Harry moved back down to London for a second time at around the time of the Big Bang in the Stock Exchange, and joined the Board of Tandem UK. In terms of his career, these were the happiest times. Along with success came the camaraderie, the fulfilment, the travel, the recognition and the rewards.

Harry was asked to move back to Glasgow, and look after customers in Scotland and Ireland. He loved going over the water, North and South, and was there when the Celtic Tiger economy was taking off in the late 80s and early 90s.

But his greatest achievement was the part he played in the call centre growth in Scotland in the late 90s and early noughties. He was an innovator and using his business acumen and sheer force of will he created a company, TSC, along with his friends and associates. This company brought jobs to areas that needed them and helped keep communities going. Between 1994 and 2000, they created 900 jobs in Rothesay, Dunoon, Falkirk and Aviemore. Harry and his colleagues sold TSC on his 60th birthday in February 2003.

By this time he was happy to retire and spend more time with his family, to travel, watch Vale of Leven FC, have a dram or two in the Old Vale Bar and to indulge his first passion, history. Having had many conversations about Vale history with his older friends in the Old Vale Bar he realised that this information needed to be recorded while those with the stories to tell were still around to tell them.

I was a fellow committee member of the Burns Club at that time and I had some basic website design experience. He approached me 14 years ago, back in February of 2006, to discuss the setting up of the Vale of Leven History website. Perhaps he always hankered after that Leader writer's job, and this was his big chance. So he put his skills and historical knowledge to good use.

Over the years Harry spent thousands of hours researching, collecting and writing the content for the project, including days on end in Dumbarton library scanning historical copies of the Lennox Herald. With this and contributions from other local historians, Graham Lappin, Billy Scobie and others we were able to create what became a freely accessible treasure trove of social history, not just of the Vale of Leven but of the part the Vale played in Scotland's Industrial Revolution

(www.valeofleven.org.uk). This was later supplemented with the Vale of Leven History Facebook page, which has attracted more than 7000 followers. (<https://www.facebook.com/ValeHistory/>)

Almost entirely due to his work the website became one of the best of its kind. It is read by people from all over the world. It's been referenced by the BBC, the local press and communities all over Scotland and worldwide. In recent years Harry was probably recognised for this more than anything else and rightly so. It will be part of his legacy.

Harry and his wife Marjory loved to travel. His career had carried him to many far flung places over the years but when he retired they had the time to visit the places they loved together. They had holidays in Hawaii, Florida, Fiji, the Cayman Islands, the Philippines, Europe and in particular many visits to Portugal, a country that they loved.

Harry was interested in Robert Burns from when he was a young man. This interest grew after he joined the Alexandria Burns Club (No. 2 in the Federation) in the 1970s. As a student of the bard he was an avid reader of his works and his biographies. His knowledge and interest were further developed when he started performing at Burns Suppers and St Andrews nights in the 1980s. I think his first speaking appearance at an Alexandria Burns Club Supper was when he proposed the Toast to the Artists back in 1993. He proposed the Immortal Memory in 2000 and spoke at many other Burns Suppers, near and far, in the years following this.



He was an active committee member for many years serving as President in 2009/2010. His contribution to the club was immeasurable. It is not being disrespectful to previous committees to suggest that in recent years Harry's influence helped create a much better organised club and committee. With his encyclopaedic memory he was the "go to" person when anyone had any questions about the club or the organisation of our events. As a performer he was always very entertaining, whether delivering humorous toasts or thoughtful and introspective Immortal Memories. He will be greatly missed in Burns circles far and wide.

From a personal perspective, I have been acquainted with Harry through the Burns club since the 1970s but I never really got to know him well until we started the history project. Harry was one of the most interesting men I have known, clever, confident, articulate, obliging, a good friend and a true Valeman. He will be sorely missed.

Bryan Weir.

On My Own Friend And My Father's Friend, Wm. Muir In Tarbolton Mill

(by Robert Burns).

An honest man here lies at rest,
As e'er God with His image blest:
The friend of man, the friend of truth;
The friend of age, and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so inform'd:
If there's another world, he lives in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.