

Sir Norman Graham



Norman Graham was born in 1913 in Dundee but his roots were very firmly in the West End of Glasgow, where he was raised and educated. His father had moved from Dumfriesshire to Glasgow to train as a marine engineer and worked at sea for several years. During the Great War his ships operated under naval direction; one was torpedoed off the Scillies while another served at Gallipoli. After the war Norman's father became a partner in a firm of engineers in Glasgow.

Norman enjoyed a stable and happy home life which left him with a lifelong commitment to the church, a love of golf and an enduring affection for the west coast, initially Arran and the Firth of Clyde but later Arisaig, Coigach and Colonsay. He was usually top of the class at Hyndland Primary School and delighted his fellow-pupils by confounding an overbearing headmaster by successfully spelling 'onomatopoeic' both forwards and backwards. He was joint Dux at the High School of Glasgow and entered Glasgow University in 1931, taking first class Honours in History in 1935 and in Classics in 1936. He then competed

successfully for the Home Civil Service, opted for one of the Edinburgh departments and was posted to the Department of Health for Scotland in October 1936.

The stamina and abilities of the small cadre of very able young civil servants then in the Edinburgh departments were to be stretched to the limit over the next few years as intense preparations were made to protect and succour the civilian population from the effects of the aerial warfare which by then looked unavoidable. Norman was involved in planning the provision of health facilities, including emergency hospitals, over much of Scotland. During this time he was still living at home in the West with time for golf and rugby but he also took on a commitment to help the Reverend George MacLeod (then of Govan Old Parish Church, founder of the Iona Community, later Lord MacLeod of Fiunary) and his talented team of young ministers to run the boys' clubs at the Pearce Institute in Govan.

Soon after the outbreak of war Norman was sent to London as private secretary to the Scottish Office permanent secretary Sir Horace Hamilton. He expected to be released to join the Navy but instead was posted to the new Ministry of Aircraft Production where he experienced a huge range of work - running Lord Beaverbrook's Spitfire Fund, purchasing strategic materials covertly from unfriendly neutral countries, planning the establishment of a college of aeronautics which would later become Cranfield University and considering how to deal with the V-weapons the Germans were known to be developing. In his spare time he served in the Home Guard and latterly as a special constable. Finally in 1944 he became principal private secretary to the minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, whom he found to be the ideal boss, pleasant, considerate and amusing as well as incisive.

After the war Norman was posted back to the Department of Health for Scotland (DHS) in Edinburgh. On promotion to assistant secretary in charge of the hospitals division, his great contribution to public services in Scotland could begin in earnest. The new Labour government were pushing ahead with the establishment of the National Health Service. DHS had to devise and negotiate solutions appropriate to the Scottish situation where, for example, the general hospital service depended wholly on voluntary hospitals. One important difference the DHS team were able to achieve was to make the teaching hospitals the responsibility of the new Regional Hospital Boards instead of leaving them as self-standing entities as in England and Wales; this was to make

for much better overall management of hospital provision over the first decades of the NHS. The Scottish Act was passed in 1947 and came into effect in 1948.

After a spell in charge of one of the housing divisions during the critical period of expansion in the early 1950s, Norman succeeded Douglas Haddow as health under-secretary in 1956, a post he would hold for over 7 years. Thanks to an improving economic situation it was possible to plan and begin to implement a comprehensive hospital building programme, including the new Dundee teaching hospital at Ninewells and a series of district general hospitals; Norman set in hand important original work on ward design, based on innovative study of working practices. These years saw an effective campaign to improve children's dental health, the mass radiography campaign to eradicate tuberculosis and a radical revision of Scottish mental health legislation, a particular concern of his. His work for the Health Service was recognised by his appointment as CB in 1961.

At the start of 1964, however, Norman's nearly 20 years of involvement with health came to an end with his promotion to be Secretary of the Scottish Education Department (SED). SED was the oldest of the Scottish departments (being set up by an Act of 1872) and had traditionally kept itself a bit apart from the others. It had only come fully into the Scottish Office 'family' in 1945 and had in the past drawn many of its senior administrators (including Norman's predecessor, Sir William Arbuckle) from the ranks of HM Inspectorate of Schools. Norman's arrival came as a breath of fresh air, not to say a mighty whirlwind!

Norman found his new department immersed in a great ferment of activity, largely led by the Inspectorate, which was aimed at modernising and re-appraising the school curriculum; there was also the ticking time-bomb of the commitment to raise the school leaving age to 16, with all that that implied in terms of resources – accommodation, teachers and curriculum. He could see the immense advantage Scotland possessed in having a single national approach to the curriculum and examinations (in contrast with the situation at that time in England, where there were several examining bodies with different curricula and there was no tradition of central leadership) and he valued the quality of the Inspectorate's work. He believed however that more should be done to involve the teaching profession and the wider public. He quickly saw that the Labour ministers who came to power later in 1964 under the former teacher Willie Ross had strong views about education and would not necessarily be willing to rubber-stamp whatever ideas the department put to them. Norman's solution was to establish a more open and consensual approach to curricular development, involving teachers as well as the Inspectorate, under the oversight of what became the Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum which he himself chaired in its early years. Norman's concept of a national system of curricular advice based on wide consultation and consensus has served Scotland well for over 40 years, and has certainly protected our schools from the over-prescription and frequent changes of direction experienced in England.

Norman's years at the SED were full of change and challenge. Labour ministers were determined to change the structure of Scottish secondary education and pushed through a wholesale changeover to comprehensive schools throughout the country; they also abolished the right of local authorities to charge fees in certain of their schools including Norman's Glasgow High School, and withdrew government funding from the then grant-aided schools. In some areas this resulted in quite dramatic changes which were nevertheless successfully negotiated and implemented. Meanwhile, far more than the expected 30% of pupils were succeeding in the Ordinary Grade SCE examinations (introduced only in 1959) and many more than previously were proceeding to gain enough Highers to go into higher education. The big expansion in teacher training provision planned by Norman's predecessors was at last enabling teacher shortages to be overcome and a properly planned school building programme was underway, including provision for the raising of the school leaving age. One element of the programme which Norman was particularly proud of was to provide decent hostel accommodation for senior pupils from remote islands and mainland areas who would have to leave home for some or all of their secondary education.

Another area of major change was higher education, where the number of universities in Scotland doubled from 4 to 8 following the publication of the Robbins Report (1964). Strathclyde was formed

from the Royal College and the Scottish College of Commerce in Glasgow and Heriot-Watt College was upgraded; all three colleges had previously been under SED's tutelage. Norman was also involved, as assessor to the University Grants Committee, in Dundee's erection into a separate university and especially in the process which resulted in the establishment of a completely new university at Stirling. In recognition of the role he played, both Heriot-Watt and Stirling gave him honorary doctorates and he later served on the Court at Stirling.

Looking back at Norman's years at the administrative helm of the NHS in Scotland and in charge of SED, one can see that it was a period of relative political calm and financial optimism in which ministers and their professional and administrative staff felt able to take a long view of prospects and plan the 'big picture' with some confidence. Norman's inspiring, magisterial leadership and flair for identifying and empowering talented individuals made sure that good use was made of this period of opportunity for the benefit of health and education.

Throughout his career Norman Graham displayed the highest commitment to public service and brought energy, directness and imagination to the work for which he was responsible. He was trusted by ministers and highly respected by his colleagues and is gratefully remembered by many of those who served under him and were inspired by him. His distinguished public service was recognised by his appointment as Knight Bachelor in 1971.

Some time after his return to work in Edinburgh after the war, Norman met and fell in love with Kitty (Catherine Mary Strathie), whom he married in February 1949. They were to enjoy over 61 years together, nearly 58 of them in Longniddry, where they had a new house built in 1952 as soon as post-war restrictions eased. There he could indulge his delight in gardening and golf, play his part in the life of the parish church (he served as an elder for over 50 years) and the wider community, and bring up his children John (who was to follow his father into the Scottish Office), Alastair and Catherine.

After his retirement in 1973 Norman served on the Council on Tribunals, the BBC Advisory Committee and the Broadcasting Council for Scotland. But perhaps the task he most enjoyed was to serve for 10 years as the Secretary of State's nominee and first chairman of the St Andrews Links Trust, which was set up in 1974 to run the golf courses in St Andrews. The Trust was highly successful and he found the work absorbing and exhilarating; what is more, when he retired after 10 years he was given the right to play free on any of the courses for life. He and Kitty also took the opportunity to travel more widely in Europe, North America and Australasia and to spend time with their children and their seven grandchildren. Norman remained physically well into his nineties and intellectually vigorous to the end. He is survived by Kitty, his 3 children, seven grandchildren and one great-grandson.

Russell Hillhouse

Norman William Graham, CB, Kt, MA (Glasgow), DLitt (Heriot-Watt), DUniv (Stirling). Born 11 October 1913; Elected FRSE 6 March 1972; Died 26 February 2010. Vice-President 1977-1980