

Alexander Ranald Hume Macdonald (1909-89)

Born in Sliema, Malta to Lt. Col Ranald Hume Macdonald, A.M., R.E. and Margaret Eleanor, daughter of the Rev. John MacLeod, D.D. Minister of Govan.

Married to Daphne Anne, daughter of John Dumville Lees.

Two children, Alexander (1941) and Fiona (1945)

Education: Eton College (1922-7), Kings College, Cambridge (1928-31)

Posts in Indian Civil Service (1931-47):

Assistant Commissioner Dibrugarh and Jorhat; Subdivisional Officer Sibsagar; Under-Secretary to the Government of Assam; Assistant Political Agent North Waziristan; City Magistrate of Peshawar; Assistant Political Agent South Waziristan; Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Naga Hills; President of the Manipur State Darbar; Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills; Judicial and General Secretary to the Government of Assam; Deputy Commissioner and Political Officer of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Khasi States; and Superintendent of the Lushai Hills.

During the War he was in charge of the Lushai (now Mizo) Hills when for a year, the district held a 100 mile front against the Japanese.

Extract from King's College Obituary:

Ranald fulfilled his duties with great energy and devotion, winning the respect of the Indian hill tribes whose dialects and customs he was quick to learn. He wrote plays and poetry for them to perform and joined in their games. Keeping in touch, and in the course of duty, he often walked forty miles a day, including a couple of 3,000 foot ridges and a river crossing. He did, however, walk at a great pace, which gave him the opportunity for a little extra time in bed while his wife Daphne set out in advance with a man holding a lantern to guide her. Long after they both returned to England they would receive letters and Christmas cards from their Indian friends, whose grandchildren would call while visiting the UK.

During the war, Ranald refused a military rank but was awarded four medals and was mentioned in dispatches. He provided essential administrative support for the military operations and helped to keep the peace on the Assam-Burma front by frequent visits to the scattered tribes. Daphne went along too as a symbol of trust and was for a time the nearest white woman to the Japanese. Luckily they were together when the Japanese announced they had caught Ranald, when all that had happened was the failure of his portable transmitter.

In 1948, Ranald and Daphne returned to England and Ranald joined the British Council as area officer for Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Then he spent a year working for Toc H before joining Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons as editor of their shorthand books and later headmaster of one of their schools. He quickly learnt shorthand himself and invented a phonetic alphabet which he taught to his friends. After five years with Pitman (1953-8) Ranald made another change, moving to the John Lewis Partnership where, after two years in the internal audit department, he spent almost eight years as Company Secretary. He also played chess for the Company club, as he had long ago played for King's as an undergraduate.

He left the Partnership in 1968, spent a year teaching economics at Westminster School and then finally retired to devote his time to charitable work and to his love of languages; he claimed to have learnt to read twenty or more, and could converse fluently in ten. When crossing the King's Road with the leads of two dogs in one hand and a book in the other, the latter could well be the *Hound of the Baskervilles* in Polish, or the Greek New Testament from which he was preparing to read the coming Sunday's lesson (in English) in his loud clear voice.

Dr Alexander Macdonald and Fiona Macdonald
September 2015