Former Gresham's headmaster Logie Bruce-Lockhart publishes his memoirs

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He helped transform a long-established Norfolk school, played rugby for Scotland and looked after thousands of refugees during the second world war.
And now at the age of 91, former Gresham’s School headmaster Logie Bruce-Lockhart has told the colourful story of his life in the book Now and Then, This and That.

During his 29 years at the private school he taught British inventor Sir James Dyson and invited composer Benjamin Britten to Gresham’s in 1964 for a concert with tenor Peter Pears. The composer attended Gresham’s when he was young.

Mr Bruce-Lockhart said: “I thought ‘very few old people seldom write’. You repeat yourself and don’t write as accurately as when you were young. But you are not concerned with pleasing anybody and can tell the truth, which is quite rare in autobiographies. If you have lived a long time you are in a better position to weigh the pros and cons of changes which have taken place. Writing the book was like bringing a baby into the world and I liked it.”

As well as reflecting on his own life experiences, Mr Bruce-Lockhart also talks about the many changes in society, including the development of education, the Pill and women’s liberation.
Logie Bruce-Lockhart, 91, a former Gresham's headteacher has written a book about his life. Logie, right, pictured with his brothers, left to right, John, Rab and Paddy, in 1939. PHOTO: ANTONY KELLY

Mr Bruce-Lockhart, a widower, was the youngest of four boys and was born in Warwickshire while his father, Rufus, was a housemaster at Rugby School.

Both his parents were born in Scotland – his father was the son of a member of the MacGregor clan based in Speyside and his mother was from the Agnew clan from south-west Scotland.

He said a big drive throughout his life was “clan pride”.

Success seemed to follow the family as his father played international cricket and rugby as well as being headmaster of Cargilfield Preparatory School in Edinburgh and Sedburgh School in Cumbria.

He also received the French Legion of Honor for spreading the love of French literature and language.

His uncle, Rob, was the last commander in chief of the Indian Army and another uncle, Robert, was director of political warfare in the second world war and was an MI6 spy in Russia during the Russian Revolution.

Mr Bruce-Lockhart’s three brother’s, Rab, John and Paddy, who have since died, were equally successful.

He boarded at Sedburgh School, which is where his love of rugby began.

"It was a bit difficult having father as headmaster. If I was successful I expected people to say 'Daddy's boy does it again'," Mr Bruce-Lockhart said.

He went on to study Modern Languages, specialising in French and German and the rise of socialism, at St John's College, Cambridge, but after a year he joined the army and trained at Sandhurst.

He said: "For public school boys, accustomed to being away from home and submitting to strict rules, discomfort and plenty of exercise, it was not a strange experience. It gave me a chance to play some rugby for the college and the army."

After Sandhurst he trained with the 9th Sherwood Foresters for three years and then joined the 2nd Household Cavalry, which provided reconnaissance for the Guards Armoured Division.

He met his wife of 64 years, Jo, in March 1944 on a train journey to army quarters in Kent.

He said: "Barging my way down the corridor looking for a seat, I saw a vacant seat in a first class carriage opposite an extraordinarily pretty girl in a smart civvy suit. She had amazing eyes and legs which seemed to go on forever. I
was dressed in my new cavalry uniform and looking distinctly less scruffy than usual. I was getting tired of my wild oats period, and I somehow knew that this was quite a different prospect."

Luckily, his future wife was posted to the same village and was a high speed morse expert for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

They married three weeks later at Trinity Church, Windsor, and he described her as an artistic and elegant person "who always looked 15 years younger than she actually was".

"She really set about making me more civilised – which was necessary," he added.

The couple had two sons and three daughters but one daughter, Kirsty, died aged seven after she was hit by a car outside Gresham's School when Mr Bruce-Lockhart was headmaster.

He said this tragic event "softened" him because he was "rather fierce" in his early days at the school.

His wife died in 2009 after a 15-year battle with cancer.

While in active service in 1945 Mr Bruce-Lockhart was one of the first British soldiers to travel through France, Belgium and Holland along the German frontier.

He said it was devastating to see the impact of the war on because his maternal grandmother was German.

Six months after the war had finished he was one of the soldiers in charge of a "grossly overcrowded" Displaced Person's Camp, on the Russian frontier where 5,000 Polish refugees were in Luftwaffe accommodation meant for 600 men.

"I learned a lot more from the army than I did from school or university," he said,

Mr Bruce-Lockhart returned to Cambridge University and graduated in 1948 with a first in his wartime degree and a 2:1 in his peacetime one. On leaving Cambridge he joined the London Scottish Rugby Club where he played fly half between 1948 and 1950.

He started his teaching career at Tonbridge School, in Kent, where he earned £300 a year and taught French, German and rugby.

Mr Bruce-Lockhart said he was so poor he could not afford a fridge or a vacuum cleaner or furnish his home until he was 33. In 1953 he left to become headmaster at Gresham's, and stayed in that role until 1982 when he retired.

He said: "I have always had a passion for country life and I'm very interested in birds and fishing. When I started, Gresham's had all the traditions of a good school but was in a bad patch and needed improvement. It was an exciting prospect."

Mr Bruce-Lockhart built new science laboratories, boarding houses and classrooms for the junior school, music rooms and a new girls' house. He also built a central block for offices.

He also introduced the changes which made the school co-educational in the 1970s.

He used to live in Bodham but moved to Blakeney in 1997 and enjoys painting birds, writing, exercising and reading regular letters from past Gresham's pupils.

His book costs £14 and can be bought from the Holt Bookshop. For more information ring 01263 715858.