
Obituary - Peter Craig



Peter Craig had a long and full life of 93 years; his was a life which was very busy and positive, a life in which he was very hard working, and was able to touch many people's lives for the better, patients, colleagues and others. He leaves a legacy of knowledge and skills that have been passed onto many others, some who continue to work in the NHS today.

Peter, to many, seemed a quiet, unassuming, affable, dignified gentleman but this belied the man he truly was.

Robert Dominic Peter Craig was born at home on August 4th 1927 in the Pendleton area of Salford. His parents Joseph and Marie were originally from Newcastle. His father had served as a Captain in the army in the Great War and been awarded the military cross for gallantry on the western front; back in civilian life he was the Head teacher of St. Sebastian's school in Salford.

Peter's older brother by 3 years Kevin, also known as 'Willy' and by Sunday name of 'Joseph', encouraged a healthy rivalry between themselves and Peter was then sub named 'Bill' by Kevin, much to the confusion of many family and friends for the rest of their lives.

When Peter was 12 WW2 broke out and his father Joseph joined the RAF as an adjutant posted to southern aerodromes and only came home every 3 months. Both Peter and Kevin were evacuated at the start of the war to Baxenden nr. Accrington, for around 12 weeks until it was decided it was less dangerous in Salford than expected, and Peter admitted that much to the relief of the elderly couple looking after them (the Ashworths), the two boys were returned to their mother Marie.

Peter attended De La Salle College in Salford where he studied diligently. In the 'Manchester Blitz' campaign of Christmas 1940, the family had direct experience of the incendiary bombs

dropped by the Luftwaffe on their area. One hit their own roof at 30 Lullington Road but fortunately bounced off without exploding, whilst two homes just across the road were less fortunate and burned down.

During the remainder of WW2 when not at school, he and Kevin spent 'holiday fortnights' at agricultural camps in Ormskirk and east Yorkshire picking cabbages and peas while the men were at war.

After receiving his Higher School certificate in July 1945, at 18 he started National Service with the Royal Lancashire infantry and was sent out to Oldenburg in central Germany, promoted to Sergeant and tasked with training the army lads with current affairs lectures!

After being demobbed, because of his national service Peter like his brother was able to take up Medicine as a paid for degree course at Manchester University for 6 years, and graduated when he was 27. Peter specialised in surgery whilst his brother Kevin specialised in gynaecology and obstetrics.

Peter spent the next seven years working in local hospitals gaining experience at Manchester Royal Infirmary, Bury General, Ancoats Hospital, Salford Royal and Stockport Infirmary, before meeting Veronica at the University's post graduate group 'the Catholic Society' and their Badminton club.

Within 3 months of meeting Veronica, he had decided she was 'the one' and they were married a year later on St. George's day in 1962. She was 23 and a Geography teacher at Stockport Convent Grammar school, he was 34 a Senior Registrar in Plastic Surgery at Wythenshawe Hospital and they settled into their first home in Heald Green.

Over the next 5 years home life changed with the arrival of their first daughter Christina and their second Helen, and shortly after the family moved to Hale.

Peter was appointed as a Consultant Plastic Surgeon at the Regional Plastic Surgery Centre at Wythenshawe Hospital and the Childrens' Burn unit at Booth Hall Hospital but following reorganisation in the early 1970's by the area health authority, his remit changed and he worked across Withington and Wythenshawe hospitals, the Manchester Skin Hospital, The Christie and

the Duchess of York hospitals.

He worked very long hours whilst at the same time obtaining his MD (Doctor of Medicine) post graduate degree in 1972 from Manchester University.

His children both attended the Hollies Prep school in Didsbury, handily just around the corner from Withington Hospital. They can vividly remember being dropped off outside the school gates far earlier than anyone else at 8am and being picked up around 5pm before often being driven home via other hospitals and spending another hour in a hospital car park somewhere while final ward rounds were being conducted!

Peter's work was extremely varied from severe burns in children who had pulled pans or kettles down onto themselves, to fire and chemical burns, or old fire bar heater burns, then there was cleft palates and lips on children often working in collaboration with other specialist oral surgeons, to skin cancers and the skin or facial reconstruction often required after their removal, and car crash victims who had gone through windscreens before the seatbelt laws were introduced. . . .

His work coincided with the introduction of exciting and enabling technology like argon laser machines that improved port wine stains, and powerful operating theatre microscopes enabling skin grafts to be undertaken in 12 hour operations instead of months in a hospital bed with many operations to move skin from one site to another in stages.

These innovations meant that limbs and hands could be reattached with a greater number of successful outcomes enabling the patient to gain far more movement and nerve sensation than had been possible before.

Peter embraced the new technologies and was keen both to extend his own knowledge and experience, and to pass on successfully developed techniques to others. His work experience and training of junior staff and registrars in new techniques and skills, led him to publish over 30 papers in medical journals and present papers around the world at international surgical congresses. His first paper was in 1971 in Melbourne but many others followed in Prague, Madrid, Rotterdam, Paris, Toronto, Rio de Janeiro, Athens, San Francisco and elsewhere.

With all this going on at work, you might have thought there would have been a tense atmosphere at home as Peter was preparing all these papers, but often the only outward signs would be piles of 35mm slides around his desk from which occasionally one of his children might absent-mindedly pick up a slide thinking they were likely to be last Summer's or Winter's holiday pictures, only to get a shock when looking at the 'before operation' patient shot.

From 1977 he led the team at the Regional Plastic Surgery Unit at Withington Hospital for some 20 years until his retirement in 1992.

During his career he was a member of many medical societies and medico-ethical organisations that met regularly of an evening but he also conducted a busy social calendar being a member of the Catenians from 1976, originally with Manchester 47 circle in the city centre where he was Circle President in 1985/86 and Provincial President in 1995/6 and served as a provincial councillor, but from 1997 joined as a member of the Knutsford Catenians.

From his work and these other activities he knew a lot of people and was often recognised and hailed particularly at airports by patients who would think he should remember them especially.

Peter was always very generous with his time and encouragement both in supporting his girls and others in their chosen careers. Maggie, his god daughter was impressed by his help and support when she was considering occupational therapy as a career aged 14, Peter invited her to stay and took her into hospital to introduce her to the therapists there and get a feel for the job.

In his spare time Peter enjoyed sailing and chartered many boats with Veronica around Scotland and the South coast, he took his yacht master, ocean master and radio operator certificates and tried to get his girls interested with many different ploys, even buying a boat and naming it after them. It didn't work. The Chrishelen unfortunately did nothing to persuade the younger members of the family to get hugely enthusiastic. It was perhaps the only time when he mentioned in jest, that boys might have been a better option!

He fared better enthusing the family with the skiing, with many happy family holidays abroad, some were joined by Kevin and other members of his family. Even when he could no longer ski downhill he was happy to langlauf across country. When he encouraged his family to take up

horse riding, Peter bravely spent a couple of summer holidays pony trekking many hours a day across the Scottish Highlands in Blair Atholl.

He enjoyed the open air and loved to play golf. With his stature and size his driving shot was powerful, and this combined with a generous handicap made him exceedingly popular as a pairs partner at Hale golf club and in Catenian golf competitions.

When the family moved out to Mobberley he decided it was time for a dog, and later another when we moved to Twemlow Green, he really enjoyed ambling across fields and along footpaths with Sam and later Raqi. With Raqi people would look surprised when you called her back. As father explained, her name was his homage to golden retriever- likeness to Raquel Welch!

He was a keen armchair supporter of both Manchester City and rugby union, but he had a variety of interests and, ever the practical man, shortly before retiring took up evening cordon bleu cookery courses.

Peter enjoyed travelling abroad and did so widely, but his faith was very important to him. One of the first things he would do on booking any holiday was to check on where the nearest catholic church was on any Sunday he was there. He would think nothing of driving 120km both ways in order to achieve this goal, as indeed he did on one driving holiday in Norway.

In retirement he enjoyed going on retreats, spending time SVP visiting, and going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Rome. Several people commented that they were on a bus trip to somewhere holy and they had a really enjoyable memorable conversation with him, ironically they couldn't always remember which holy place, but they remembered Peter!

He was invited to be a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre in 1999, and subsequently invited to become a Knight Commander.

After Veronica died just 2 months before their 50th wedding anniversary in 2011, he was keen to downsize and move into Holmes Chapel, to be closer to St. Margaret's church and when he did, he was particularly delighted to be able to move in next to his priest Father Jim. Peter died unexpectedly at home from a stroke on March 11th but with family present.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE