

IN MEMORIAM - TOM DAVIDSON KELLY

O God, whose strength setteth fast the mountains, Lord of the hills to whom we lift our eyes: grant us grace that we, once chosen to watch the mountains of an earthly kingdom, may stand fast in the faith and be strong, until we come to the heavenly kingdom of him who has bidden us watch and pray, thy Son, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

The Regimental Collect of The Black Watch, the Regiment Tom served for five years as chaplain in Germany, Northern Ireland and Edinburgh, sums up as only Collects can several of the essential strands of his life and ministry. He never failed to lift his eyes to the Lord of the hills even in difficult and challenging situations both professional and personal; he always stood fast in the faith and was strong in the strength of God who set fast the mountains; and now that Tom himself has come all too soon to that heavenly kingdom, we can but watch and pray with those who loved him best and miss him most.

Thomas Alexander Davidson Kelly, better known to so many of us as TDK, was born in Edinburgh on 10th March 1949. There were early signs of his future profession every time a family pet died and Tom put on his grandfather's undergraduate gown, employed a stick as a crozier to match an improvised mitre, and conducted a full funeral service with hymns and prayers! He was educated at Edinburgh Academy and went on to the University of Edinburgh, first to study English Literature and graduate MA in 1971, followed by his BD in 1974. He was to serve as Assistant Minister at Dundee St Mary's for two years before being inducted to Kilberry linked with Tarbert in Argyll, where he met and married Kim McArthur, a member of the congregation. It was in 1982 that Tom was accepted by the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and he and Kim moved to Werl with The Black Watch but not before Tom had attended the Professionally Qualified Officers' Course at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where his course report suggested he was "weak on physical ability, average in appearance and military knowledge and good in intelligence, practical ability, powers of expression, zeal and energy, robustness and confidence." Sounds like TDK alright. After a further posting to the Scots Guards, Tom relinquished his Regular Commission in 1989 and was inducted to Govan Old, a place of ancient worship and tradition which suited his interest in liturgy, history and architecture down to the ground.

Sadly Tom's health forced him to retire from parish ministry in 2002 and he and Kim retired to Kilmarnock. Or should that be "retired"? For Tom maintained so many of his passions and enthusiasms – for Peter MacGregor Chalmers, Charles Carmichael and the poems of Charles Murray among many others; for the Church Service Society, the Scottish Church Society, the Dunkeld Fellowship and many others; for family and dogs, art and books and music and wine among so many others.... – right to the end.

TDK died in Ayrshire Hospice on 28th March 2017 and after burial in the Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh, a Memorial Service was held on 8th April in his beloved Govan Old. Characteristically, Tom had put a great deal of thought into the service and specified that it should take the form of a "Presbyterian Sung High Requiem Mass." His instructions were duly carried out with help from various colleagues and musical support from the Director of Music and Choir of Paisley Abbey. The service was attended by many members of the Church Service Society, who have good reason to be grateful not just for Tom's loyal service as Honorary Secretary and Vice-President, but for his infectious humour and boundless enthusiasm, and for the "powers of expression, zeal and energy" that were by no means restricted to the hallowed corridors of Sandhurst but which drove so much of what he said and wrote and inspired. We continue to assure Kim, Neil and Campbell and all the family of our love and prayers, and find assurance ourselves in the promise of great glory contained in another Regimental Collect:

Almighty God, whose blessed Son did say unto St Andrew "Follow me", grant that the Scots Guards, who wear the Cross of thy Holy Apostle, may follow thy Son with impunity; be made stronger in brotherhood and fierce against all enemies of our Saviour, ever going forward under the leadership of him, who by the hard and painful way of the cross, won high conquest and great glory, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.