

Ian Garnet Maclaren 1915-1997
Born 24 August 1915, Troon, Ayrshire, Scotland.
Died 16 February 1997, Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland.
Son of Norman Maclaren 1880-1936 & Mary Margaret Garnet 1894-1989.
Husband of Annette Mary Birtwistle. Father of Robert, Hamish, Simon, & Susan.

1967

Article by John Fowler ...

Grandfather Robert Maclaren, an impressive paterfamilias in his bristling whiskers, set up his foundry in the south side of Glasgow in 1844 and the business had been kept in the family ever since. But early in the 1960s grandson Ian Maclaren realised that the old story was coming to a close. By this time the engineering side had been dropped and production was concentrated on thermostats and heating controls. The business was prosperous enough - in fact it was increasing satisfactorily - but, looking ahead, Ian Maclaren knew he could not be complacent.

The firm of Robert Maclaren, as it was still called, was very much a small fish in a pond which included big fellows like Honeywell and Elliott Automation. One by one small individual competitors were being swallowed by the giants, the mergers giving them the capital strength and the research facilities which Maclaren knew he needed if he was to keep in the swim. How much longer could his business remain on its own?

Nearing the end of a five-year plan, he was uncomfortably aware that a fresh injection of new capital was needed to provide new products, broaden the scope of the company, and bring new ideas into fruition. And capital on that scale, in a private company where all the shares were held by himself and his relatives, was not easy to come by. Maclaren did not relish going public, since it might have meant loss of control of the firm and in the prevailing conditions would invite takeover. In the event he decided to go in for the takeover business himself, offering for a company in London which would have enabled him to establish a broader base.

The result was not what he had foreseen. His bid came to nothing, the company he wanted was ultimately linked with an American company and by this time it was clear that Maclaren's itself was in the market. 'That started the furore', says Maclaren wryly.

When the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation of America showed interest, Maclaren and his fellow directors decided that it would make sense to tie up with a firm which operated in an allied field and which would back them with the strength of a world-wide organization. The ITT at that time was ninth on the list of the world's private-enterprise employers and moving up.

The offer could not fail to attract. ITT had started as a small company operating telephone services in Puerto Rico and Cuba, went into telecommunications manufacturing on an international scale with the purchase of the International Western Electric Company in the 1920s, and then in 1959 began a massive reorganisation and growth programme which greatly extended its size and diversified its interests. ITT is now big in a number of fields outside telecommunications and is in the insurance business, owns the Avis car rental outfit and the Sheraton chain of hotels. Its subsidiary, General Controls of Glendale California, particularly attracted Maclaren's because this company specialised in the gas control and overlapping the interest Maclaren's had already built up in the central heating market.

So at the beginning of 1963 the firm of Robert Maclaren, later to be named appropriately Maclaren Controls, became a subsidiary of ITT, proudly cherished in ITT publicity literature as the oldest established company in the organisation. Even so, the Scottish company did not lose its identity. For one thing, Ian Maclaren remained firmly in the chair, unlike other cases when, as he remarks, 'the owner is usually slung out'. Maclaren stayed on, and proof that ITT was satisfied with its new recruit came two years ago, when he was made head of the European Controls and Instrumentation Division of the parent. As such he is responsible not only for the Glasgow factory but for the Drager factory in Essen, Germany, a smaller factory in Holland, and sales organisations in most countries in Europe.

Nowadays he finds that only one third of his time is spent on Maclaren Controls business (he has just appointed a general manager in Glasgow to take the load off his shoulders) and that the remainder is devoted to the European side. Ian Maclaren has joined the jet men, the top men with suitcase and passport at the ready, and he reckons on spending at least two days in the average week on the Continent.

There was a forlorn moment when a phone call interrupted our talk as his secretary made arrangements for a lightning visit to Brussels, at the end of which he asked: 'Does my wife know I won't be home?' She didn't. Maclaren, 53, has spent all his working life with the firm apart from the war years, after which he became general manager and later managing director. His wartime career was distinguished, including the award of the DFC for harrying German night convoys from the air in North Africa. Having reached the rank of Wing Commander he then proceeded to become a TA Colonel in the Argylls after the war had finished.

Obituary: Ian Garnet Maclaren DFC TD.

Combined from obits submitted to, and much of which appeared in, The Herald, (Glasgow) Published Thursday 6th March 1997, The Scotsman and The Ampleforth Journal.

Ian Garnett Maclaren died at home in Gatehouse of Fleet on Sunday 16th February at the age of 81.

Ian Maclaren had a varied life that spanned distinguished war service, international business success, and voluntary work. He was born in Troon in 1915 and was brought up in West Kilbride while his father was a Professor at Glasgow University. He and his brother Peter learnt to enjoy golf fishing shooting and other country pursuits.

He was educated at Ampleforth (St Wilfreds 1925 - 32. Prep School in 1923 and was a founder member of Wilfreds, and boasted that he was selected for the house cricket team when the house only had eleven members) and Glasgow University where his father had been a professor. He served as an engineering apprentice before joining the old established family firm of Robert Maclaren & Company which manufactured thermostats in Glasgow.

He claimed that his first memory was of being held by a nurse, at the age of two, in front of a window to look at an airplane. This was being flown by his cousin, Fred Maclaren, who had been an aerial observer at one of the British Army's last cavalry charges at the Battle of Huj in Palestine in 1917. He joined the TA as a Gunner in 1938 and was mobilised in August 1939. Transferring to the RAF in 1941, flying Blenheim light bombers. During his tours he took part in all the early landings - in Dieppe, North Africa, Sicily, and Italy as the king noted when presenting his DFC . He was awarded an immediate DFC for action during the final attempted German breakout at Kesserine Pass in Tunisia. By following a railway line under very low clouds in foul weather his was one of only a few aircraft that got through and carried out several attacks. On returning to base, where his gunner found that his own parachute had been shredded off his back by the intense AA fire, he rearmed his aircraft for a second sortie. Unfortunately this was thwarted by a malfunction ten minutes from target. For this action the squadron was signaled commendations by Monty and Air Marshall Tedder and received a visit from General Alexander to express his personal thanks.



Ian Garnet Maclaren with his Blenheim Crew

Note From 614 Squadron History

The Kasserine Pass break-through was assisted by 614's attacks on enemy transports and both 'Monty' and Air Marshal Tedder signalled commendations as the Bisleys left the roads littered with useless Nazi vehicles. General Alexander visited the squadron to give them his personal thanks

It was believed that he, with his navigator and gunner, who served together for exactly two years, were probably the last surviving intact Blenheim crew. He was posted to Combined Opps for D-Day and ended the war commanding an air base in the Philippines which, after VJ-Day, was used for the evacuation of prisoners of war. He was one of the first to fly into Hong Kong after Japan's surrender.

His great aunt was the famous Abbess of Stanbrook on whose correspondence with George Bernard Shaw the successful West End Play 'The Best of Friends' with John Geilgud was based. He attributed his survival during the war to the prayers of Stanbrook Abbey.

In 1947 he married Annette Birtwistle whose four brothers had been at Ampleforth. They were married by her uncle, Fr Stephen Marwood.

On demobilisation he returned to the family company in Glasgow, eventually becoming managing director. He sold the company to the US conglomerate ITT in 1964 and became the CEO (manager) of its European Controls Division. This required him to spend much of his time on the Continent.

Having reached the rank of Wing Commander during the war he was asked to command 277 Field Regiment Royal Artillery, the Greenock TA unit, in 1958. This he did for four years and had the distinction of commanding two different regiments when the Gunner Regiment was amalgamated with and rebadged as. 5/6 Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. At that time the battalion held the World Pipe Band Championship. He enjoyed the confusion caused by his TD (Territorial Decoration) alongside his RAF wings and decoration.

Preferring to spend more time in Scotland he retired from business in 1975. Having earlier chaired the building committee for the local Catholic church in Largs he became involved in the local community, helping to start a local branch of Age Concern, including instigating a day centre. He wrote the constitution for the local community council. His home and gardens were opened for many charitable functions.

He was the local representative for SSAFA. He stood unsuccessfully in the first Strathclyde Regional Council elections in 1973 before moving to New Galloway in 1975.

There he became treasurer of the local Conservative Party and was chairman and treasurer of the Galloway branch of the National Trust for Scotland. He co-founded the Thursday Lunch Club and the Easter Charity Reel Club.

He was a keen shot and enthusiastic angler and shared with his brothers a love of gardening. He enjoyed National Hunt racing and for a while had some success with horses in training. He was an enthusiastic painter and skier, an occasional golfer, and had taught himself to sail before the war.

He is remembered by his friends for his sense of humour and the dog which accompanied him on all his country pursuits. (and for the outstanding gardens that he left at his homes in Skelmorlie, Ayrshire and in New Galloway. Kirkcudbrightshire.

He is survived by his wife Annette, whom he married in 1947, three sons, and a daughter.