

# Jean Marie Gabriel Cadet de Fontenay

THE SUDDEN DEATH, at the age of 73, of one of Oban's more colourful characters, Jean Marie Gabriel Cadet de Fontenay, is a great loss to his friends, colleagues and students alike. 'Gaby' passed away peacefully at his home in Miller Road, Oban, on December 3.

Born into a family of seven sisters and three brothers in Mauritius on June 16 1927, Gaby was the youngest son of **Reine and Gabriel de Fontenay**. As a son of the de Fontenay household, Gaby was drawn into the world of Cable and Wireless Communications, a world in which Gabriel the elder was already a senior officer.

Under the guidance and tuition of his father, Gaby became a skilled telegraph operator, sending transmissions all over the world on the early 'suitcase radios'.

With the advent of the Second World War, the child Gabriel found himself with considerable responsibility on his shoulders. British-governed Mauritius became a key listening post for the activities of AXIS, the German/Italian Alliance, and the movements of the Japanese fleet in the Indian Ocean.

All too soon, Gaby became aware of the importance of his position and that of his colleagues, particularly when introduced to Lord Gray, a senior member of the Ministry for Economic Warfare. Gray not only visited the island to ensure the safety of his Mauritian operatives but to deliver 'sensitive' instructions and ensure the ongoing effectiveness of Cable and Wireless' transmissions.

The Ministry for Economic Warfare, bolstered by funds from the wealthy Courtald, Gray and Twining families, brought together the skills of codebreakers and safecrackers with the expertise of a more nefarious nature. The purpose of their activity was to augment the training of commandos prior to infiltration of occupied France and the task of aiding their French resistance allies. Many of these covert operations during the War were overseen by Morris Buckmaster, Head of F Section, and in command of the Special Operations Executive, and it was from Buckmaster that Gaby, his father and his colleagues, took many of their instructions.

Working closely with Gray, Buckmaster, Twining and others, Gaby's post intercepted and relayed masses of information useful to the British Government. On occasion particularly 'sensitive' messages were transmitted from the secrecy of the de Fontenay's attic, hidden even from other Cable and Wireless operatives. These early days became the basis of many of Gaby's stories, told with relish time and again, but never enjoyed any less by him. Gaby eventually retired from Cable and Wireless due to ill health and de-

cidied instead to take up the role of educator. Ever the British patriot, Gaby relocated to Scotland in 1955 and set his sights on Edinburgh University and Moray House, gaining the eminent Master of Arts and Certificate of Education qualifications of which he was so proud. His certificates took pride of place on either side of Pietro Annigoni's portrait of the Queen, **The 'Man of Letters' as his door plaque** proclaimed, then went on to a distinguished career as a Master at both Cargilfield and Elgin Academy.

In 1976, Gaby took the small island of Tiree by storm. Usually immaculately dressed in blue blazer, chinos and loafers, complete with silk tie and handkerchief, Gaby was the archetypal French and Latin teacher. He began a stamp club for the pupils funding a shield for the best collector every year from his own pocket. On school trips Gaby was always prepared to buffer pupils from the stern command of other teachers, **'but they are only children!'** he would say. Typical of Gaby to ensure that learning was accompanied by fun, a never-ending supply of sweets and fizzy drinks for his pupils ensured **that education was rewarding.**

After gently 'stuffing' the knowledge of French and Latin between the ears of his Tiree students, Gaby retired and came to Oban in 1989. Never satisfied with a quiet life he began the education of Oban's youth, and, as some of you will know, the not so youthful. Many of Gaby's students now attend the Universities of Oxford, Edinburgh, Heriot Watt and Glasgow, an achievement of which he was rightfully proud.

Gaby remained a dedicated teacher until his death and it has been said by one of his students that his pupils were his family, a testament to his love of teaching and affinity with those he taught.

A former colleague has said of Gaby that he was 'full of life', others of his friends and students have talked of his irrepressible sense of humour, his kindness and generosity, his stubbornness at times and his infectious laugh. I remember all these things, together with his generosity of spirit, compassion for those in need, an infinite supply of corny jokes and a delight in being a habitual winner on 'Lucky Dip' every Wednesday and Saturday.

My lingering memory of Gaby though, as I am sure it will be for many of you, will be sitting in his armchair smoking, or attempting to smoke his pipe, while an ever increasing pile of spent, family-sized matches accumulated in his ashtray. My father tried for many years to teach Gaby to light his pipe, in some ways I'm glad he didn't succeed. One of Gaby's close colleagues and friends has laughingly suggested that perhaps Gaby never stopped talking long enough to truly get his pipe under way. His voice and his presence will be sadly missed. Whatever our memories of Gaby are, we will remember him: as a father, a colleague, a mentor, a friend.

Gabriel is survived by his daughter, Marie-Anne Levert, currently residing in North-West Calgary, Canada.

God bless, Gaby, and goodnight - Elizabeth.