

MARK ROBERTS DAVISON



DAVISON Mark Roberts 7879 (1961–67) NR
Davison Grazier Murrumburrah; Prep,
Jnr Mac, Mac, Bro, Sm. HC. Hm. CUO.
Vacy Prize 1966, Solicitor and Investment
Banker. [13 20 26.09 26.10 28.01 28.07
28.08

Born	2 August 1949	NSW
Died	24 August 2019	Queensland

Mark had a couple of nicknames, including Marko and Dorb. There are some of us who think that the origin of Dorb was a bastardisation of Frank Dalby Davison (author of inter alia *Man Shy*). Whatever you called him, he was a big personality, a man who filled the room physically and intellectually.

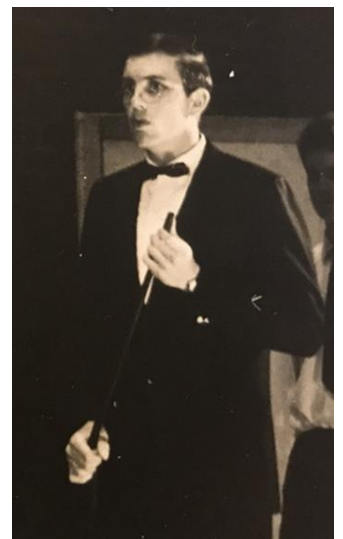
Mark was born and grew up in the country. His parents, Noel and Sheila, owned a farm near Harden-Murrumburrah. He was the eldest of four children with a sister Sally and brothers Roger and Charles¹. Notwithstanding his country roots, Mark never seemed to have much affinity with the country, although during his career he did put together a couple of consortia to buy rural assets including 'Redbank', one of the prestige properties in the district, and a vineyard called 'Moppity Park' which ultimately ran into trouble through lack of available water. However, for Mark, the best thing to come out of Harden–Murrumburrah was Lindi Joseph, the daughter of the town's GP. They were an item from an early age and married in 1972.

It is difficult to describe Mark's time at King's without coming back to that word 'Star'. He started as a boarder at the Prep in Year 6 in 1961 then went on to Junior Macarthur until that house moved from its old digs to the New School. At Junior Macarthur, along with the rest on the first-year intake, he was required to put his name on his bed. He did so with aplomb: MR Davison, it read. As a first-year he had no claim to be called Mr so he was socked! Such is life. From Junior Macarthur he changed camp to Broughton, initially at the Old School doing the daily bus commute up and down to the New School and then to the newly-built Broughton House at Gowan Brae. He was a School Monitor and House Captain of Broughton in his final year as well as being a CUO in the cadets and B Company Commander.

Mark was a talented athlete. He played in the 1st XV rugby team in 1966 and 1967 and was chosen for the GPS 1st XV in sixth form. He rowed in the 1st Eight for two years, being one of the winning crew in the GPS Head of the River in his final year. He was also a pretty good runner and competed in the 880 yards and mile races with some success, being awarded colours for athletics in 1965. While Mark may not have fitted the physical mould for the ideal middle distant runner, he made up for this by his sheer will power and determination. This characteristic was evident not only in his sport but in nearly every aspect of his life.

Owen Mortimer (Master 1965 to 1973) directed a school production of 'Men Without Shadows', a play by Jean-Paul Sartre set in Vichy France during the German Occupation in WWII. Mark had a starring role as Clochet, a particularly nasty individual who was intent on persecuting several captured French Resistance fighters. As one of those being tortured, Scott Alison can attest to the earnestness with which Mark played his role!

Mark as Clochet in 1967



Scott Alison has many memories of shared experiences from these school years, which have not faded with time: times spent at the property at Harden-Murrumburrah during school vacations; the parties (and there were many); playing strip-jack-naked with the Frensham girls on the old steam-driven Riverina Express on the way back to school; the hours spent on the rowing bus taking the rowers to and from school and the boat shed and the many week-ends spent building paths/steps/gardens at the new boarding house. Somewhere in all this he did study because in the HSC he was placed =18th in Economics 1, was awarded a Commonwealth University Scholarship and achieved a

¹ TKSOBs; Roger (1965-1971) and Charles (1970-1976)

score which got him into Arts/Law at ANU. He subsequently picked-up a Master of Laws from London University in 1976 and did the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School in 1983.

Eleven King's boys headed to ANU with Mark, four in Arts/Law, so details of that period can be reported with some accuracy. As always, sport seems to dominate. In their first year at university the ANU colts rugby side was well populated with King's old boys, and the ACT Under 19 Representative Team included Mark and Dave Walters in the second row, Rob Willcocks in the centres and Cyril Payne at full-back. In subsequent years, Mark progressed to the First XV and was a very strong and influential member of that team. In 1971 he was ANU Rugby Club Captain, a year in which the Springbok side was touring from South Africa. Mark made himself unavailable for selection for the ACT side to play the Springboks on the basis that he refused to play against a team selected on racial grounds. This was a courageous decision as the Springbok tour was sanctioned by the Australian Rugby Union and in refusing to play for the ACT, Mark was effectively snuffing out his chances of possibly playing for the Wallabies.

On rep duties with the ACT Under 19s, Rob Willcocks recalls travelling to play football in Cootamundra with four or five others in Mark's fifth-hand Renault. They struggled to get up the hills but once over the top Mark would throw it into neutral to coast down the other side, presumably to save petrol. When it appeared likely that they would fail to make it up the next hill and would have to get out and push, Mark simply calmed the situation by stating, 'Anyway it's a lot of fun!'

With Arts and Law degrees in his pocket, Mark headed to Sydney where he took a position with law firm Freehill Hollingdale and Page (FHP). This suited Mark: long hours of hard work and being in the thick of things. Scott Alison and his wife Jenny shared a house with Mark and Lindi in the mid-1970s and each night when the mere mortals would head to bed, Mark would settle down to do at least another couple of hours work. He worked his way up through FHP focusing mainly on company mergers and acquisitions and corporate structuring work. He was made Partner in 1978 and the following year went to Perth to set up a Perth Office for FHP which involved a merger with Perth firm Muir Williams Nicholson and Melbourne firm Moules.

Meanwhile, the Australian investment banking industry was developing and James Graham and Graham Rich, in conjunction with Wesfarmers, had put together a corporate advisory firm called Gresham Partners. Mark left FHP in 1984, initially to head up the corporate advisory team at Rothschild Australia but the following year joined Gresham and from then on continued to work in the corporate and financial advisory space. Again, Mark was in his element, working on complex transactions under pressure. One of his corporate clients was BRL Hardy and as a result he became heavily involved in the wine industry. Of course, this made it necessary for Mark and Lindi to embark on numerous trips to visit beautiful wine growing regions around the world and attend events such as the Bordeaux Wine Expo. He ended up being a director of BRL Hardy. He resigned from Gresham in 1991 to set up Aus Asean, a boutique financial advisory firm, doing similar corporate advisory work but with aspirations to expand into the Asian region. To this point, apart from a couple of years in Perth, Mark had spent all his time living and working in Sydney and while this was going on, the family had expanded with the addition of Mia followed by Aleya and then Zoe.

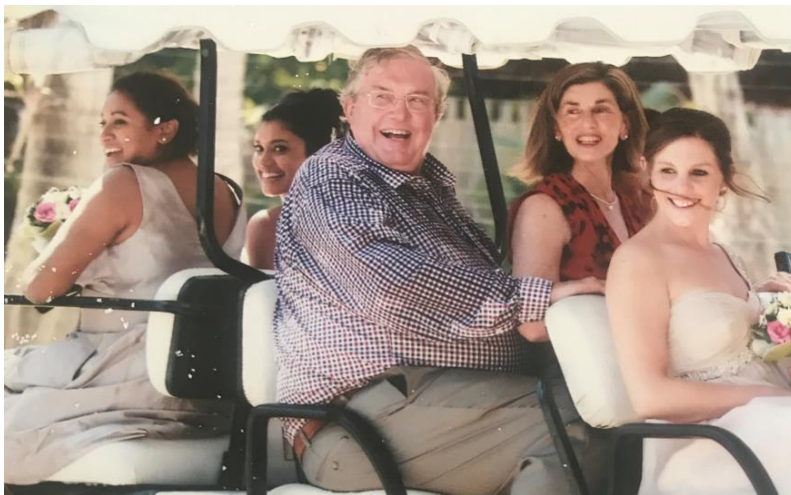
In 2000 Mark departed Sydney and moved with Lindi and the girls to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland where he lived until he died. During this time, he worked for himself and continued to assist some of his old clients such as BRL Hardy. He always had a deal on the go and had that knack that investment bankers have of making a seemingly simple deal as complicated as possible.

During these years Scott and his wife Jenny shared some wonderful holidays with Mark and Lindi (Morton Island, Fraser Island, South Straddie or sailing around the Whitsundays) along with Richard and Glenda Kirkby and Adam and Jilly Johnson. For each of these it was always Mark's idea and all they had to do was turn up. Mark would have planned and organised every detail of the trip down to the last prawn, hook, line and sinker and loaded it all into his trusty old Landcruiser, named Bruce. Mark looked after Bruce and Bruce looked after Mark. On one occasion at the end of a holiday on Fraser Island, the group needed to get back from the rental house at the northern end of the island to catch the ferry at the southern end of the island. Normally it was not a problem making this journey along the beach providing there was not an incoming tide and you leave in plenty of time. Needless to say, the group left late and the tide was well and truly on the way in. Bruce started to complain about the undue haste, particularly the speed at which he was being asked to negotiate the many gutters formed by the water receding from the waves as they pounded the beach. And then Bruce stopped - in a large gutter where each wave crashed and surrounded the group up to the gunnels. A normal person would have been concerned about this situation but not Mark who proceeded to coax Bruce with many four-letter words and the dextrous application of WD-40 to the distributor. Sure enough, Bruce sprang to life again and all proceeded south down the beach.



It is terribly hard to do justice to such a complex personality that was Mark Roberts Davison. All who knew him admired Mark's dogged determination and his fierce drive to succeed. He drank more than most which did not do him any favours. He could be the most charming person in the room but he was not a man to be crossed. He liked to be in charge and could get very edgy when he wasn't in charge. Scott never saw him back down to anyone - on anything. Cyril Payne remembers a group of ANU students quietly drinking a few thousand schooners in a country pub when one of the locals took exception and approached with ill-will, bearing a broken beer bottle; Dorb quickly took the fellow in hand, disarmed him and sent him on his way suitably chastened! While this head-on approach could work to his advantage it may also have worked against him in business.

Throughout his life, from early on he had a sense of style about him which was apparent in the way he dressed, the way he carried himself and the way he interacted with people. He never wanted to be ordinary. He was the consummate host. Whether it was a dinner party at the Davison residence in Sydney or the Waldorf Astoria in New York, a surprise birthday party for Lindi or a party for his mates, he was always generous, expansive and inclusive – and whatever he did, he thoroughly enjoyed it. While his family and friends were central to Mark's world, for some reason he was hardest on those who knew him best and loved him most.



(L to R) Mia, Aleya, Mark, Lindi and Zoe
at Aleya's wedding

Mark had a few health issues towards the end, but it was his heart that finally did him in while he was at home on the Sunshine Coast on 24 August 2019.

Post Script. When word reached the ANU Rugby Club that Dorb had died, there was a push to have a reunion, which came to fruition in February 2020 in Canberra. Rob Willcocks and Cyril Payne were there from the '67ers, with a crowd from all of the ANU and ACT rugby circles. Many fine words were spoken and even Mark would have felt somewhat embarrassed at the wonderful way in which he was remembered.

Contributors:

Scott Alison, Cyril Payne, Rob Willcocks, Adam Johnson, John Chancellor, Rodney Hammett

Photos courtesy of Lindi Davison and Scott Alison

Mark leading the Honour Guard at Victoria Barracks, 1966



Kings School VIII 1967, winner of the Head of the River



Bow, D. B. Simmons; 2, M. C. Wilson; 3, M. D. Howard; 4, A. F. Reynolds; 5, R. J. Kirby; 6, M. R. Davison; 7, A. S. Alison; Stroke J. A. Chancellor; Cox, G. W. J. Bowman.