

# Obituaries

## Michael Gascoigne

Agricultural law expert who disciplined Tony Blair in his schooldays

**Michael Neill Clifton Gascoigne, lawyer. Born: 1 February 1949 in Inverness. Died: 11 June 2021 in Kirkcaldy, aged 72**

When Michael Gascoigne was three, his mother was taken into hospital near Inverness suffering from acute post-natal depression. The condition was little understood in the early 1950s, and certainly not treatable as now for she died in that same hospital six years later as a result. He was brought up instead by his paternal grandmother at Foulis Castle, north of the Black Isle, and those early years spent in relative loneliness in the Highlands were to shape the rest of his life.

At 13 he was awarded a scholarship to Fettes College, Edinburgh, where he excelled in all aspects of school life. Studious and inquisitive by inclination, popular with his peers and teachers, and with a good eye for a ball, he took advantage of the many extra-mural activities Fettes offered. His claim to fame during this period was being obliged to discipline his “fag” Tony Blair, but Michael never revealed the nature of the latter’s misdemeanour, nor the punishment. He went on to read law at the University of Aberdeen.

In 1971 he was appointed as an articled clerk to Brodies WS in Edinburgh – one of Scotland’s foremost law firms. On arrival the senior partner advised Michael that it would benefit him to apply for membership of two august bodies: The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (Muirfield) and The New Club, Edinburgh. With characteristic obstinacy he applied to neither. Instead, he took up trackside marshalling with the Scottish Motor-sport Marshals’ Club – an unusual pastime, but one to which he devoted many years. It gave him enormous pleasure to be made President of the club in 2020. He vowed never to play golf, and kept true to his word throughout his life.

At 24 Michael was the youngest person ever to be made a partner by Brodies. A sound technician, he developed a full knowledge of the law with an acquisitive interest in all aspects that affected the countryside. He became a specialist in agriculture law – his expertise and encyclopedic knowledge were regarded throughout his profession as second to none. Per-



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haps best described as a lawyer’s lawyer, he was a past master at finding clever but sensible solutions to the knottiest legal problems and tracing a way through the maze of a complicated property transaction. He was renowned for his diligence and his deft care for clients, who ranged from crofters to many of Scotland’s wealthiest and most influential landowners, all of whom he treated with the same loyalty, humility and respect. Remuneration from his cases was of no importance to him: the only thing that mattered was what was right.

By the mid-1990s his name appeared third in the list of partners at Brodies, and he had become a key member of the Rural Affairs Committee of the Law Society. The course seemed set for him to become senior partner but he did not embrace the commercial imperative which had swept through legal practices in the 1980s and 1990s. His love of the law and tenacious dedication to his clients were not matched by a willingness to issue increasingly hefty invoices. The consequence was inevitable, and after many warnings, his services at Brodies were dispensed with.

Foulis Castle, his childhood home, is the ancestral seat of the chiefs of the Clan Munro. When he came of age, his uncle Pat

Munro, then chieftain, persuaded Michael to join the Council of the Clan Munro Association. He served for over 40 years and proved himself invaluable, both in giving wise general advice and in all matters legal. This included completely rewriting the Council’s constitution, setting up the Clan Munro Heritage Museum Trust and delivering a £1.3 million development at the Storehouse of Foulis on the shore of the Cromarty Firth.

Michael devoted much of his leisure time to other pursuits, four notably connected with motorsport. In addition to his role in the Scottish Motorsport Marshals’ Club, he was a key figure in the Scottish Motor Racing Club and a senior official on the RAC Rally. At the time of his death he was Chairman of the Royal Scottish Automobile Club, where he had been a member since 1971, and chairman since 1998. It was, as he once put it, “hard work and good fun in equal measure”.

After Brodies, he joined Gillespie Macandrew, first as a partner and latterly as a consultant. Consultancy suited his talents better, enabling him to avoid involvement with the day-to-day housekeeping of the business. Kind and understanding by nature, he devoted himself to mentoring young lawyers and passing on his deep knowl-

edge, particularly of agriculture law. He taught in parables, giving of his time generously. But he was never one to embrace the advantages that technology might offer, and only several years after the use of mobile telephones had become commonplace did he reluctantly accept one. He almost took it as a personal affront if someone sent him an e-mail, and the reply could be guaranteed to be terse. “Can’t type” was his excuse when challenged.

He was a first-class rifle shot, which combined with his keen interest in deer to make him a very proficient stalker. Such was his marksmanship that it was only with difficulty that a friend managed to persuade him, after many years, to stop using open sights on the hill and switch to a telescopic sight.

He had three children from his first marriage, to Anna Milne, Jamie, Gemma and Peter.

In 2000 he wed Linda, and in 2016 he retired; cruelly, a year later Alzheimer’s was diagnosed. With unfailing support from Linda, he battled against the odds, but was later diagnosed with incurable cancer.

Michael is survived by his wife and children, brother Patrick and step-brother David. His other step-brother, Dick, died in 2017.

CONTRIBUTED

## NOW & THEN



↑ Scottish politician David Steel beat John Pardoë to become Leader of the Liberal Party on this day in 1976

### 7 JULY

**1534:** The first known exchange between Europeans and natives in the European colonisation of the Americas took place at the Gulf of St Lawrence, New Brunswick.

**1550:** Chocolate, native to Mexico, central and South America, was introduced to Europe.

**1548:** The Treaty of Haddington, between Scotland and France, confirmed the betrothal of Mary, Queen of Scots and Dauphin of France.

**1559:** John Knox became the first Protestant minister appointed in Edinburgh.

**1575:** The Raid of the Redeswire, skirmish between Scottish and English borderers.

**1753:** The British Museum was founded by an Act of Parliament.

**1814:** Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley was published.

**1850:** British explorer Edward Eyre, the first man to complete the 2000-mile coast-to-coast journey across Australia, reached Albany.

**1890:** The first electric chair execution took place in New York.

**1891:** The first travellers cheques were issued by American Express.

**1913:** House of Commons passed Irish Home Rule Bill.

**1925:** Glasgow’s Kelvin Hall was destroyed by fire.

**1929:** The Vatican became a sovereign state.

**1944:** RAF Bomber Command dropped 2,572 tons of bombs on Caen, France.

**1950:** Farnborough staged its first air show.

**1967:** Civil war in Biafra began.

**1974:** New Zealand imposed a blanket ban on sports teams representing South Africa.

**1976:** David Steel was elected leader of the Liberal Party. 1976: Viking 2 went into orbit around Mars.

**1978:** The Solomon Islands gained full independence within the Commonwealth, having been a British protectorate since 1899.

**1981:** Solar Challenger, piloted by Steve Ptocek, became the first solar-powered aircraft to cross the English Channel.

**1990:** Martina Navratilova, 33, won a record ninth Wimbledon women’s singles title, beating Zina Garrison.

**1994:** Unions said they would fight the government decision to close Rosyth naval base with the loss of 1,800 jobs.

**2005:** Fifty-six people died

and more than 700 were injured when four British suicide bombers attacked three London Tube trains and a bus in the rush hour.

**2007:** Live Earth, a series of charity concerts to promote environmental awareness, took place in various cities around the world.

**2008:** The General Synod of the Church of England voted in favour of the consecration of women bishops.

**2011:** Britain’s biggest selling newspaper, the News of the World, announced it would close due to the ongoing damaging allegations against it relating to the phone-hacking scandal.

**2013:** Andy Murray defeated Novak Djokovic 6-4, 7-5, 6-4 to win the men’s singles final at Wimbledon and become the first British male champion for 77 years.

### BIRTHDAYS



**DR SIR IAN WILMUT OBE**  
Dolly the sheep cloning scientist, 77

Sir Ringo Starr MBE (born Richard Starkey), Beatles drummer, 81; Jeremy Guscott, rugby player and broadcaster, 56; Michael Howard, Baron Howard of Lympne, Conservative Party leader 2003-5, 80; Bill Oddie OBE, actor and ornithologist, 80; Jeremy Kyle, TV presenter, 56; Jack Whitehall, English comedian and actor, 33; Cassidy, American rapper, 39; Shelley Duvall, American actress (Popeye, The Shining), 72; David McCullough, American author and historian (1776, The Wright Brothers), 88; Michelle Kwan, American five-time world champion figure skater, 41.

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Births:** 1860 Gustav Mahler, composer; 1887 Marc Chagall, painter and designer; 1921 Ezzard Charles, world heavyweight boxing champion; 1930 William David Mungo James Murray, 8th Earl of Mansfield and Binsfield.

**Deaths:** 1816 Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Irish playwright; 1890 Henri Nestlé, founder of Nestlé; 1899 George Cukor, US film director; 1919 Jon Pertwee, actor; 1930 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes; 1973 Veronica Lake, actress; 1984 Flora Robson, actress; 2006 Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd founder