

**Bobby Furber**

Lawyer, sportsman, collector and bon viveur who played jazz piano and wrote about golf clubs



Furber: jazz and the popping of corks helped him retain the vitality of a 28-year-old all his long life

**BOBBY FURBER**, who has died aged 95, was a top London lawyer who took his pastimes as seriously as his work.

Slim, dapper and effervescent, he complemented his career at Slaughter & May and Clifford Turner by playing golf, writing two books about golf clubs, painting, collecting antiquarian books, playing jazz piano, teaching himself italic handwriting, saving south-east London from inner ring road encroachments and always opening the best bottles of Meursault or Puligny-Montrachet for his friends and family.

Jazz and the popping of corks helped him retain the vitality of a 28-year-old all his long life. Receiving treatment in his nineties at the London Bridge

Hospital, he exclaimed: “Do you know, that was the best hospital meal I’ve ever had!”

Frank Robert Furber, universally known as Bobby, was born on March 28 1921 at Whitchurch in Shropshire, the son of Percy Furber, a British cheese factor who took his own life in 1931, a tragedy which may have later helped engender his son’s kindness to needy young people. After several years’ boarding at Willaston School, Cheshire, he became a day boy at Berkhamsted, where he first became interested in jazz, especially Fats Waller, motor sports and the cinema.

His passion for golf and an elegant, effortless way of striking the ball had already been established at Hawkstone Park, the nearest golf club to his Shropshire birthplace. Here he scored his first hole in one at the age of 15.

Prevented by poor eyesight from doing military service, Furber completed his education at University College London and became an articled clerk at Slaughter & May, qualifying as a solicitor in 1945. In 1952, he became a partner, specialising in property and planning matters, at Clifford Turner, which would later integrate into Clifford Chance and become the largest legal practice in the world. Here he made his mark by spotting and fostering young talents like Stuart Popham, later senior partner at Clifford Chance, and Victor Blank, later chairman of Lloyds TSB.

He is also remembered for wining and dining clients and colleagues, sometimes twice a day, at the old Boulestin restaurant in Covent Garden.

In 1948, he married Anne Wilson McArthur, a teacher, and moved into the then almost unknown Blackheath, eventually finding the house in Pond Road, where his four children grew up and he would spend the rest of his life, chairing the Blackheath Society and the Blackheath Preservation Trust and successfully defending this part of London from the menace of modern developments.

He also became a member of the Royal Blackheath Golf Club and later became captain at Royal St George’s, Sandwich, where in 1981 a worldwide television audience would see him presenting the golfing world’s famous claret jug to the latest open champion, Bill Rogers.

Not just a brilliant amateur golfer, Furber also became chairman of the Rules Committee at the Royal and Ancient and wrote a formidable history of Royal St George’s, *A Course for Heroes* (1996), which he followed with his *History of the Moles* (2012), an account of an exclusive coterie of amateur players, of which he had long been a member.

All this while, he remained equally in love with jazz music, delighting

visitors to his Blackheath home by playing a medley of Fats Waller hits on an ancient Blüthner he had bought on the advice of his friend and former client Yehudi Menuhin. In 1986, he marked his retirement as a solicitor by playing jazz piano on a mobile float during the Lord Mayor's procession, and in 2001 celebrated his 80th birthday by playing a duet with Jools Holland at the Blackheath Concert Hall which he had helped preserve.

Bobby Furber could not have achieved all he did without 67 years of love and support from his wife, who died last year, leaving him fully active to the end. A month before his death, he went putting at the Royal Blackheath, not only scoring six holes in one but also downing a pint of beer at 9.30 in the morning and then writing a letter in his still exquisite italic hand to the club's chairman, claiming: "There was no doubt to me whatsoever that the practice green was in the finest condition I can ever remember it."

Bobby Furber is survived by three sons and a daughter.

**Bobby Furber, born March 28 1921, died June 29 2016**

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