

DOUGLAS BROWN (27-31)

He died on 25 October 2003 aged 86. Funeral services were held at St James the Less Church in Colchester and St Mary's Church, Polstead where Douglas was buried. JOHN BUCK (G42-47) attended the funeral.

Copied from the Guardian of 24.11.03. By Michael Walsh

Shortly before Douglas Brown retired in 1977 as the BBC's first religious affairs correspondent, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, praised him for the "accuracy of a probing mind" and the balance of his "judgement and knowledge, both in the ways of the Church and the ways of the media".

Brown, who has died aged 86 was touched, especially as Coggan was not among his favourite clerics: his own leaning was to the catholic, rather than the evangelical, wing of the Church of England. Coggan's view was shared by the anonymous author of the preface to the 1973-1974 edition of Crockfords, who observed that Doug's "standard of accuracy, knowledge and penetration expose the shallowness of much of the reporting of religious affairs in even the most prestigious of our quality newspapers".

Born in Framlingham, Suffolk - his father was a Master Mariner - Doug was already interested in religion by the time he won a scholarship to Framlingham College. He got his first job, on the Framlingham Weekly News, after submitting an article on the monks of Bury St Edmunds. Following war service in the Royal Engineers, which took him to Jerusalem, he joined the Eastern Daily Press in Norwich before moving to London in 1950 as a BBC general news reporter.

Doug was a consummate news reporter - a tape of his interview with Hastings Banda, in which the then Malawi president refused to answer a single question still does the rounds at the BBC. He asked, however, to be allowed to concentrate on religion and became church affairs reporter in the 1960's and then church affairs correspondent. The changing makeup of Britain led, in 1975, to the new title of religious affairs correspondent.

Apart from religious news reports he had a regular Saturday morning slot on Radio 4 and contributed Christian Newsletter to the World Service. He also had a considerable hand in the Sunday programme, a roundup of religious news which still survives.

In retirement, Doug and his second wife Pat, whom he had met as a nurse while recovering from dysentery, moved to a thatched cottage at Polstead, Suffolk, where a vast study window overlooked Dedham Vale. "I am a passionate, xenophobic East Anglian" he said.

Until over 80 he kept himself fit by taking long cycle rides, often with a camera on his back, for photography was a serious hobby. He continued to write on religious affairs, especially for the Church Times. He was also able to indulge in more academic interest in religion by signing on for several Open University courses. At the time of his death he had almost completed a meticulously researched book on religion in Britain since the Second World War.

He is survived by Pat, and by Angela, the daughter of his first marriage.