

Grigor McClelland Obituary

Founder of Manchester Business School who successfully combined commerce with social responsibility and reform

Grigor McClelland, who has died aged 91, brought sturdy Quaker virtues to business management and helped to pioneer the subject as an academic discipline. In the tradition of the Rowntrees, Darbys, Frys and other notable members of the Society of Friends, he excelled in combining commerce with philanthropy and working for social reform.

He was the founding editor of the [Journal of Management Studies](#), which is still globally influential after 50 years, founding director of the [Manchester Business School](#), and author of a string of books on management whose readership has lasted for half a century. He headed his family's north-east grocery firm, Laws Stores, for 24 years, chaired Washington new town development corporation and played a forceful part in bringing Nissan carmakers to Sunderland in 1986.

Conventional images of a company boss or management guru played no part in the makeup of a man who drove ambulances as a conscientious objector in the second world war and faced down "red" smears when he joined Quaker delegations to China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s. He returned his CBE in protest at the 2003 invasion of Iraq and was especially robust on the need for ethics and social responsibility at work, convinced – and convincing to students, colleagues and opponents – about the benefits for business, jobs and society.

McClelland's approach to philanthropy similarly combined the practical and ideal, following Joseph Rowntree's belief in tackling social causes of poverty rather than in palliative measures. He served on the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust from 1956 to 1994 and was its chair between 1965 and 1978. His enthusiasm drove forward important campaigns, including support for corporate liability in cases of severe neglect



Grigor McClelland and his family set up the Millfield House Foundation to tackle deprivation in the north-east of England

or mismanagement. Tough as a successful businessman had to be, he was overcome by emotion when reporting to fellow trustees about a meeting with the families of those who had died in 1987 on the capsized ferry Herald of Free Enterprise.

Thoughtful reform also marked the [Millfield House Foundation](#), which he and his wife, Diana, and their four children set up in 1976 to tackle deprivation in the north-east – and which received significant financing from the sale of Laws Stores in 1985. Grant recipients were consulted and their views influenced policy. The same line was taken under his chairmanship by the [Tyne & Wear and Northumberland community foundation](#), which he co-founded in 1988, and the National Lottery Charities Board, which he chaired in the north-east in the late 1990s. He constantly lobbied policymakers through personal contacts and groups such as the [Network for Social Change](#).

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McClelland was the only child of Jean and Arthur McClelland, who founded the family grocery business in 1907. He went to Leighton Park Quaker boarding school in Berkshire and was on his way to Oxford when the second world war intervened. He served with the Friends' Ambulance Unit on the frontline in north Africa and during the invasion of Europe, and stayed on in occupied Germany as a relief worker. There he learned the power of reconciliation in a bitter atmosphere that saw him and his colleagues billeted with as many German families as practicable to prevent reprisals. He later set out the lessons learned in his memoir, [Embers of War \(1997\)](#). Upon his return to Britain, he resumed his education, earning a first-class degree in philosophy, politics and economics at Balliol College, Oxford, in 1948, after only two – rather than the usual three – years of study.

McClelland modernised Laws Stores before returning to Balliol in 1962 as a fellow in management studies – a subject that at the time drew considerable scorn. One sceptic considered it as foreign and useful as drum majorettes. Blessed with a commanding presence and a manner that could match patrician critics, McClelland showed how calm thought and study could improve the dinosaur level of industrial relations in 1960s Britain. At Manchester he founded the business school in 1965, and was professor of business administration from 1967 to 1977.

Those who met him, sometimes over-awed on first encounter, soon discovered he had a mischievous and self-effacing side, and a focus on the views of others. This served him well when he returned to Newcastle in 1978 to lead Laws through a time of crisis and prepare it for eventual sale.

His lack of pride allowed him to request the return of his CBE in 2009 when British troops withdrew from Iraq. He was conscious that the honour was held on behalf of other charity workers in Tyne and Wear and tickled that Downing Street had said that he could have it back any time he wanted when acknowledging receipt of the returned medal in 2003.

McClelland was sustained and refreshed by a famously lively family who filled his and Diana's home in

Gosforth with activity and discussion. He roamed the hills of northern England and Scotland, and skied and played tennis well into his 70s. Three years after Diana's death from cancer in 2000, following 54 years of marriage, he married Caroline Spence and welcomed her three children – Jacob, Rebecca and Tom – and grandchildren to the fun and debate.

He is survived by them; by his sons, Andrew and Stephen; his daughters, Jen and Rosemary; 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

- William Grigor McClelland, philanthropist, businessman and academic, born 2 January 1922; died 6 November 2013