

Tribute to Canon Brian George Carne

08.04.16

I am most grateful to Gill for spending time with me and providing me with a huge amount of information to enable me prepare this tribute to Brian which it is my privilege to give on behalf of his family and his many friends. To sum up Brian's life cannot be done in a few words - I make no apology for the length of this tribute

Brian was born in Bebington, on the Wirral Peninsula on 11th April 1929 to parents Bertha and George Carne and was a brother to Archie.

He attended Wirral Grammar School and after a short gap working as a Youth worker at the YMCA, he continued his academic life at Liverpool University gaining a degree in Commerce.

But Brian was drawn to the priesthood, and attended Queen's College Birmingham where he gained a degree in Theology which led to his ordination in 1956.

Brian's first appointment in 1958 was as curate at St Augustines, Swindon where he was fortunate to serve under a remarkable training incumbent, Rev Arthur Ringwood. Arthur, or Ringy as he was affectionately known was blind but he did not let this disability hamper his calling. He gave Brian an appreciation of what it was to live with a disability, something which stood him in good stead for his own future ministry.

When Ringy took over additional responsibility for St Andrews with St Bart's in Bristol, Brian remained as his curate longer than normal so that he could help him to orientate and familiarise himself with new places and people. Brian and Ringy's wife Mary raised money for the churches by making hundreds of pots of marmalade during this time and sent Ringy out to sell them - he knew the parishes so well even though he couldn't see!

Brian learned to write in Braille so that he could keep in touch with Ringy.

During this period, Brian met a certain young lady, one Gillian Doncaster to whom he took a shine. Gill was living in the parish, and asked the handsome young curate for the times of prayer meetings. He came to visit her, but he was not the first on the scene. Ahead of Brian, in charged Pook, Ringy's Mastiff so cementing a shared love of dogs right from the start of their relationship!

Gill and Brian were engaged in December 1959 and were married in Worcester on the 21st May 1960 and Pip their first child was born the following year, followed by David in 1964

In 1960, Brian was appointed to his first living as Rector of the Parishes of Lydiard Millicent with Lydiard Tregoze - a happy time and where Brian was able to indulge in his life-time passion for historical research, as we shall hear a little later from Sonia.

In 1968, Brian moved to the parish of Hartcliffe, on his appointment as vicar. Now you could call it a coincidence or a God incident, but 9 months to the day of the Carne family moving into Hartcliffe, Ben was born, along with babies to each of the two curates!

Hm! - something in the water, maybell!

Hartcliffe is a suburb of Bristol City and a quite different parish from Brian's previous rural idylls.

With a population then of some 20,000 it was a challenging move. But the people were wonderful and Gill and Brian have kept in touch so much so that only two years ago a coachload came to Whitehouse to see them. Ministry was wonderfully ecumenical as Anglican, Catholic, Brethren and Salvation Army all came together to minister in a kind of brotherhood to the flock.

When the wind blew, members of the congregation had to climb onto the roof and sit on it to hold it down. Money was always a challenge, but the roof was finally repaired.!

David remembers helping Brian to deliver cards and food boxes to those in need and being extremely proud of his Dad who was obviously a minor celebrity in the community

One of my favourite stories which Brian told me came from this period. As you can imagine in such a large community and with something in the water as we have already heard (!), there were many babies to baptise.! On one occasion during a particularly hot spell of weather, Brian had arranged a multiple baptism service. Now by multiple we are not talking of just 3 or 4. No. it was something like 20 babies to be 'done'! Each was robed in white, slippery nylon finery. Imagine the scene as the babies got hotter and more fractious, and the clothing got more slippery by the minute. Not to mention Brian himself who was wilting under the heat. Brian said he was lucky to end the service with all the babies safely intact and back in their parent's arms! He vowed never to repeat the experience, and urged me never to attempt more than two babies at a time!!

In 1974 the family moved to Almondsbury when Brian was appointed vicar of St Mary's and chaplain at Hortham Hospital, and later became priest in charge of St Mary's, Olveston with Aust, Littleton Severn and Elberton. A challenge for one person to serve so many communities - but one which Brian rose to and where his ministry was much appreciated. Again, Gill and Brian have retained close links with many parishioners and having the choir here today, speaks volumes of the respect and affection felt for them both.

Ben, aged 9, at the time, particularly remembers Brian taking him to see the film, *Smokey and the Bandit Part 2*.

During his time at Almondsbury, Brian was appointed Rural Dean in 1980, made an Honorary Canon in 1982, appointed to Bishop's Council, served on the DAC and last but not least, Chair of Governors at the local school. I have Brian to thank for urging me to stand as a Governor at English Bicknor School only months after arriving in the village - such was Brian's

ability to coerce people into taking on roles for which he felt they were suited - many of you will also have experienced that gentle persuasion!!

Should Brian have had his head turned by this list of additional responsibilities bestowed on him, it took one child at Almondsbury school to bring him down to earth with a bump.

'Vicar', she said, when he was walking through the playground after a long meeting with the Head teacher, 'You are always coming into school - why don't you get a proper job.! Gill showed me a wonderful scrapbook of memories which the children presented to Brian when he retired.

Retirement came prematurely following a massive heart attack in 1992 and so ended a wonderfully full and varied ministry of almost 40 years. Did I dare to say Brian's ministry ended in 1992 ? Far from it! With a move to Whitehouse in English Bicknor, so began a further 24 years of generous, voluntary ministry to this community.

And it is hard to know where to begin. Brian has been involved in practically all aspects of village life and has also reached out to parishes in the surrounding Forest of Dean - taking services when called upon to help out.

Brian was a great enabler. He would play to people's strengths, get them on board and then help them to take over the running of events.

He started English Bicknor History group of which he was a faithful member, he chaired the Parish Fete group meetings, he set up Friends of St Mary's and assisted Christchurch in setting up Friends of Christchurch; he supported Gill in starting the successful fortnightly Lunch Club where he loved reading Forest stories to them and helping to arrange outings, and he made it his business to get to know a wide range of people living locally. He was an active member of Probus.

Brian loved the Forest humour often picking up priceless gems when visiting people. When he was in Lydney Hospital he met a miserable elderly man from Gloucester who was not at all amused at having to be brought to

Lydney - the only bed available. His opinion of the Forest?

'Once you've come past Over bridge, heaven help you!' Brian found this comment highly amusing.

He had a wicked sense of humour as witnessed by those of us who had gathered two years ago at the vicarage for an informal post-Christmas evening of carols and mince pies. Picture two gentlemen of a certain age, heads together chortling with irrepressible laughter, and when challenged, looking like two naughty school boys caught out after sharing dubious secrets.! And who was Brian's partner in crime? - none other than Mr Bob Aston, our organist today - I hope you are listening Bob!

Brian supported Church outreach initiatives - a regular member of the Mid-week communion congregation in the village Hall, invariably turning up to T@3 always with an item of poetry to entertain us; Pop in lunches and Christmas Coffee mornings when Brian would always call the raffle prize winners out.

Brian was interested in people; he liked talking with them, finding out about them and putting a smile on their faces. People felt better for spending time with Brian. His interest in history is legendary and the Bicknor History book owes much to Brian's dedication to local research. Brian also showed a competitive streak - trying hard each Saturday to finish the Telegraph Cryptic crossword before Ann Falkner!!

If you telephoned Brian, no matter how busy he was or how tired he might have been, he always made you feel your call was important to him. 'What joy' would be his opening response or 'How very nice!' Followed by : 'The answer's yes, now what's the question'!!

To find out the date of someone's birthday, one simply had to ask Brian - he had an encyclopaedic memory for dates and events that mattered to people and kept an ongoing record of birthdays transferred from diary to diary. When asked during his final week in Gloucester Royal Hospital if he would like to be in a quieter side ward, his answer was a definite 'NO' - he

loved watching the comings and goings, and listening to the exchanges between nurses and patients.

Some comments Gill has received from those whose lives were touched by Brian include the following:

- He was and will remain a stronghold of virtue and example.
- He was the backbone of the village and worked tirelessly to bring community together
- His life's work is ongoing through many people lives that he touched.
- Brian will be remembered with great affection and gratitude. His wise counsel brought comfort and hope to people especially in times of doubt and grief. I feel so honoured to have known him
- He was unique - warm, loving, wise and knowledgeable - a fine Christian who helped countless people to know Christ.
- Heaven has been throwing a party for days as it gains a truly wonderful soul.

And there are many more equally touching tributes.

Archie wrote to Gill saying, amongst other things:

Brian loved talking to people; at a very early age, and long before moon landings were dreamt of, it was my opinion that if he were to land on the moon he would soon find some to talk to! It was something of a family joke that often the only time we had a brief chat was on our respective birthdays. But I always knew that if I needed him he was there, and it's for this I shall sorely miss him.

Today would have been Archie and his late wife Jean's wedding anniversary.

Retirement offered Brian greater time and opportunity to enjoy his extended family and it is to the younger generation that I now turn.

The grandchildren are very proud of their grandfather. They admired him, and his knowledge of all kind of subjects fascinated them. All the grandchildren came to say goodbye to Brian, and Matt and Daniel, 2 of the oldest, wrote very personal letters of thanks for who Brian was to them, their love, respect and admiration for him, thanking him for the influence that Brian has had on their lives.

Brian's great-granddaughters are not able to be here today, but have written loving, sparkly messages on cards on the memory tree. Brian was able to see the scan of his first great-grandson, who is due to be born in August.

On meeting Tony in the churchyard recently, Brian said;

'I'm not on my last legs yet - but I am on the last leg of the journey'

Brian's dignity as he approached death was wonderful to witness and his calm acceptance of his condition, unexpected and grim as it was, was an object lesson for all who truly believe in a secure future in heaven with an all loving and all forgiving God.

I asked Brian shortly before his death - 'Are you at peace Brian?' and his one word answer said it all 'Absolutely'

Many people have been influenced by Brian and many have been shocked and saddened by his death.

On Brian's death, David put a sign 'RIP Rev Brian George Carne' outside his shop on the main A38 road in Rudgeway. Several people called in to speak to him, and to say that Brian had married them and that they remember him.

Brian conducted countless weddings, and his priestly calling was of utmost importance. But when it came to Pip and Robert's wedding in 1984, Pip wanted Brian to be her Dad. That he walked down the aisle with her, gave her away and sat with Gill in the service are precious memories for Pip. Rev David Such, colleague and Vicar of the next door parish of Alveston, conducted the wedding, and he is here today.

Sadly, a recommendation by a group of Bicknor parishioners some years ago for Brian to be recognised with an MBE fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, Brian was invited not once, but twice in his life time to garden parties with the Queen at Buckingham Palace - once accompanied by Gill, and the other by David.

And with this in mind, it seems appropriate to end this tribute by quoting the last verse of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem 'If'.

**If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son.**

To the **Man** that was, and always will be in our memories - husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and brother; your friend and mine

Canon Brian George Carne

A Man of God

May he rest in the peace and joy of heaven