

Boys Brigade and School Tributes: Brian James Dimbleby and Address on the Christian Hope

Ron Vernon

President, Mid Staffs & Sandwell Battalion, The Boys' Brigade

I believe that Brian joined the 1st Polesworth Company of The Boys' Brigade at the age of eight, in what was then known as the Life Boy Section. He continued through the older sections and ranks to eventually become a Staff Sergeant, and after completing his training eventually took up the position of an Officer in the Company. He was a member of the BB for an unbroken 63 years.

Brian was always an inquisitive individual wanting to understand how things worked and I always remember a story I was told. The Company Captain Roy Harding, used to smoke a pipe and one company parade night Brian was caught striking match after match from Roy's matchbox. When questioned what he was doing, Brian replied "Sir, I am checking that all of the matches in the box work properly for you".

I came to Polesworth in the September of 1971 and along with my wife we started going to Polesworth Baptist Church and became close friends with Brian and Mary. It was through Brian that I became a BB officer in 1972. On one occasion I happened to tell Brian I had been in the BB as a lad and very soon afterwards I became a Warrant Officer and subsequently a Lieutenant in the company.

Throughout his time as an Officer, Brian was 'Sure and Steadfast' in his allegiance to the BB and sought opportunities to '*Advance Christ's Kingdom amongst boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness*'. Over the years he developed great relationships with boys in the company, who to this day have lasting memories of Brian and the impact he had upon their lives.

I had some great times at camp with Brian and although he didn't engage in the more physical activities, he was always ready to have a chat and often for longer than you had planned, sometimes well after 'lights out'.

Brian's commitment to the BB never wavered, even in recent years when his health was not at its best he could be found on a Tuesday night at BB organising activities for the younger members of the company in the Anchor Boys, along with the young girls of the Explorer section of the Girls' Brigade. Indeed this is what Brian was doing the very night before he quietly passed away the following afternoon.

As President of the Mid-Staffs and Sandwell Battalion of The Boys' Brigade, I want to take this final opportunity to pay our respects and to acknowledge all of the young lives that Brian has touched and influenced over the years as a dedicated and fully committed Officer of the 1st Polesworth Company.

Earlier I said that I became an officer in the BB because of Brian. In 2010 I also became a Governor at the Polesworth School because of Brian, and in 2017 he was at it again, encouraging me to become a director of the Community Academies Trust, but that is another chapter in the real "Life of Brian".

Maura Favell

The Head, The Polesworth School

Brian was a true gentleman. He was warm and kind, with a very dry sense of humour and wit. There are two key words that immediately spring to mind when I think about Brian – loyal and supportive. As a Headteacher these are key qualities for a Chair of Governors and a critical friend. He had Polesworth School running through him like a stick of rock. The fact that an entire room of his house was filled with Polesworth documentation speaks volumes!

Brian was calm, logical and level-headed – everything that I am not! So you could say that he was the Ying to my Yang. He must have held his breath whenever the phone rang hoping it wasn't me. However, he never gave that impression. Suffice to say that no matter what I presented him with I knew that he was always in my corner.

Brian dedicated so much of his life to helping other people. He devoted his heart and soul to his local community and the people who live here. The fact that you are all here today is testament to the high esteem in which he was held.

Brian was trusted and respected by all. He loved this school and this school loved him. He kept a tight rein on full governing body meetings and he was not afraid of challenging me and my colleagues when he needed to.

At the heart of every aspect of Brian's work as a teacher, a Boys Brigade Leader and as a Governor was a desire for young people to do well and achieve their potential. What Brian had was a vocation. Nothing he ever did was purely a job or a fleeting interest. He was passionate, fair and provided consistency and stability through many changes here at Polesworth.

Brian guided Polesworth through many an educational innovation and initiative. Let's face it – the DfE hardly allow the grass to grow before changing everything again. So here are a few of the changes that Brian had the pleasure of working through here at Polesworth:

- Specialist School Status
- Academisation
- The creation of the Community Academies Trust
- A Level Curriculum reform
- GCSE curriculum reform
- The removal of National Curriculum levels at KS3
- A move from National Curriculum levels to a scaled score at KS2
- A move from letters to numbers at GCSE
- A Level assessment reform
- GCSE assessment reform
- The building of Drayton

I feel privileged to have known and worked with Brian. He was a force for good and his impact and contribution to our school and community and will be greatly missed.

Revd Nick Nicholas

Address on the Christian hope

Brian was born on the 9th April 1946, the only child to Cyril and Gladys Dimbleby. He was brought up in Dordon, and went to this school, at which he was not very good at sports. He always said that the cross country marshals knew that when he came past them, it was time they could pack up. He was better at other subjects, and for a boy who wanted to be a maths teacher, he didn't let a grade D in maths put him off.

After school he went to Shenstone Teacher Training College, where in the Christian Union he met Mary, for whom Brian made a special sacrifice for Brian loved The Shadows, endlessly playing their records, and even being inspired by them to take up the guitar, and yet he agreed to go with Mary and others to a Cliff Richard concert.

After the concert Brian invited everyone back to his place to watch TV, a benefit of his uncle owning the town's TV shop. The others could not come, having essays to do but Mary did, which gave Brian the chance to speak of his sense that they were more than friends. Now Mary had been going out with another, very handsome man, but she found that under his appearance there was a hard and uncaring heart. Whereas in Brian she saw a man with a good heart, honest, caring, and loving and their friendship blossom so that a year after completing their teacher training they married on 26th July 1969, which God blessed with the gift of two sons & later grandchildren

Brian became a maths teacher, whose energy and talents not only led him to be the head of maths at the Hartshill School, but also an officer in the Boys Brigade, and a Saturday worker, helping his uncle, rent, sell and fix televisions. A job he so enjoyed that left teaching to essentially run the business for several years. But when he had the chance to buy the business he saw that the days of the local TV shop were ending, and returned to teaching, here and then at QUEMS, until he retired from the profession in 2007.

He might have left teaching but he hadn't left education or given up work. He was still active in the Brigades, & a governor of & later the chair of the Governors of this school. And in our Baptist Chapel in a relationship that began in Sunday School, was a deacon & Church Secretary. Given his background you might have thought he would

have become our treasurer, but he had a worrying weakness – he was always eager to spend the money!

In remembering his activity we mustn't lose sight of the essential man. He was a husband of old fashioned virtues: faithful, caring, providing. A father who delighted in his children, always preferring to help rather than tell off. A man who liked history and holidays abroad when they could be afforded in Spain and Yugoslavia, in Italy and Austria. And let the confession be made, he and Mary were able to enjoy holidays in New Orleans & Hong Kong, courtesy of JVC for all the TV's he sold.

He was a man who enjoyed fell walking in Wales and the Lake District, for whom the annual Boys Brigade camp was a chance to share the joys of the outdoor life, where his booming voice could gather a scattered troop from across the fields as well as tell a joke and express a dry sense of humour, which no doubt flourished when he and his fellow officers took time out in the Wainwright Inn, with a pint of the best 'old peculiar'. And then there was food.

Brain enjoyed eating, from restaurant cuisine to the bacon sandwich he always stopped to buy at his favourite lay-by caff, even on his way back from his check-ups at the George Elliot Hospital. He was always the hungry youth whose home-coming greeting to his mother when he got back from college was, 'Mam, I'm home, put everything you've got in the pan, I'm fed up with living on bread and jam.'

But he was not a man for DIY and gardening. Anything that threatened to be messy he didn't do.

Perhaps Brian's most precious gifts were his willingness to help others and his commitment to building positive relationships. The two go together.

If I may speculate I suspect that Brian did not become the head of maths, because he was an Einstein of theory, but because alongside his knowledge of the subject he could relate to the children, helping them in their struggle with the problems, because he could relate to the teachers, building each of them up in their giftings and all together as a team, and because he could relate to the parents, as a teacher who treated their children with fairness and respect. And all these gifts were carried through in his BB work, his school governorship and his church leadership, for they were not clothes

that he wore for the role but the character of his being.

And in all this he did not puff himself up, but was always dedicated to the benefit of others. In seeing Brian you glimpse Jesus.

Here's something you may not know about the Bible. Nowhere in it is there a book called, the proofs of the existence of God. What is in it is the unfolding and still continuing story of a relationship between God and people. God is not a deity to be explained but a person to be known in experience. As Jesus said to Philip, He said to Brian, and to us, to see Me is to see the Father, not as in a poor reflection but as a direct representation. Jesus invites us into a relationship with God, to know Him not by theoretical study, but in trust as a child knows a loving Father, as a friend knows a friend.

In the Head's office, amongst all the appropriate messages of this and statements about that there is a simple plaque on the wall, which reads:

Friendship is not about who you've known the longest. It's about who walked into your life and said, I'm here for you and proved it.

In coming here to celebrate Brian we have not come to honour an out-there celebrity, a man we lift up on a pedestal of fame, but do not truly know; we have come to honour a friend, for when he walked into our lives he didn't just say stuff he did stuff, helping us in our needs and our joys.

As for Brian, so for Jesus. He is not the God of a far away distance too high to hear our cries, too holy to get engaged with our lives, too busy to be busy with us. He is the God with God who took on our flesh to be a man with Mankind, to stand beside us as our friend, so we would know just how real His Father is and how much He loves us.

When as television customers you called on Brian for a new TV, you didn't have to know the theory of how televisions worked. Though I'm sure Brian would have been happy to chat over that. You just wanted a better tele and trusted him to help you.

Like Brian like Jesus, He is here for you, there's no need to know theology, you just need to know you need a better life and a friend who can deliver it. And call Him up in prayer. He promises, call me in the day of trouble and I will answer you. Trust in God, trust also in

Jesus, for He is the way to true life, for today and for ever. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.