



Obituary

Bryan Sydney Priestley

4th October 1942 – 17th July 2010

A fortuitous coincidence – that is how the meeting of Bryan and Maureen could be described: fortuitous, not only for them, but for the many, many people who came to know Bryan in Ireland. Bryan was born and raised as one of five brothers in Surrey at Horsell, a leafy English village. It was here where he learned to ring church bells, ride motor bikes, drive cars and chase girls. His early life always sounded to me to be fairly close to the edge – on a trip to Surrey, four years ago, any decent piece of main road we came across was greeted with the words “used to get close to a ton, coming down here”. Bryan also recounted plenty of stories of his days stockcar racing when he spent much of the race time being crashed into, crashing into others, or hanging upside down in a safety harness. I think bell ringing was too safe because he stopped ringing when he was about 22. Oh - he eventually gave up motorbikes too – after attempting total wipe-out on a Limerick roundabout and completing a lap of the Isle of Man TT race as a pillion passenger on his brother’s bike.

Needless to say, Bryan did, I understand, settle down. He raised Diane and Steve with his first wife Monica. This more mature attitude to life also involved a more sedate transport mode – canal barge. His work was varied as a plumber and building worker and he finished his work in England as manager of maintenance for a hospital trust. He had great stories about various jobs that went slightly awry, including a 10cm heating main which spectacularly burst when he was working on it following a frost. All of this work experience set Bryan up to be a brilliant handyman. There are many households in Counties Clare, Tipperary and Limerick and Kerry which look and feel better because Bryan improved their look and facilities. His initials always amused me. Bryan Sidney Priestley - BSP - British Standard Pipe – that’s a plumbing thread.



It was while working in the hospital trust that Bryan’s eye fell on a lady in one of the offices that subsequently always needed some “minor maintenance”. The “rest is history” as they say, and Bryan and Maureen married 13 years ago. It was then that coincidence and intrigue began, because his mother had unearthed letters revealing that Bryan was related to a William Purdue who cast bells in Limerick. Not only that, but Purdue had fallen to his death from belltower in 1673 and was buried beneath the main aisle here in this very Cathedral. So, the Priestleys were inside, and, because they have a burial plot in the Cathedral graveyard, the Clancys were on the outside (looking in as Bryan said). It is wholly fitting then that Bryan’s ashes will be interred in the Cathedral grounds, thus in effect completing the coincidence.

Of course, Bryan had to undergo the cultural challenge of living in Ireland. There was the language barrier best typified by: “Pass me the twum tacks Bryan” – “Pass me the drawing pins Bryan” and “Your clothes are in the hot press” - “Your clothes are in the airing cupboard”.

He also had to adjust to Irish time – I always told him that we were up to 40 minutes behind Surrey, but he never believed me! Maureen’s mam always defended him by saying “I don’t know how that man puts up with you!!!” when the cultural challenge became too obvious.

In 2000 or so, not long after having moved to Killaloe, Bryan was innocently cleaning another love of his life – his white Volvo - when he closed the door as Betty Brislane parked next to him. Following a general conversation, it transpired that Bryan had once rung bells and so there was no escape – Betty said he had to come into the Cathedral. That he did, and he took a commanding role in all things to do with maintenance, teaching and running practices. Bryan was Ringing Master for the Southern District of the Irish Association of Change Ringers for 5 years and then Chairman for 4. He became tower keeper as soon as St. Mary’s Cathedral ringers could elect him and was Assistant Ringing Master for nearly 10 years. A full circle then – Purdue to Priestley – bellfounder to bellringer.

In 2001, Bryan and Maureen welcomed Tara into their home life. “Dedicated and loving Dad” sums him up here, I am sure. Only last Friday he was telling the ringers how they had been to get the schoolbooks and how Tara had said she would carry them because they were heavy, and he was ageing!! Maureen often refers to Tara as Bryan’s other half.

Well, that is a potted history of Bryan – there are many details left out, I am sure. What of Bryan the man?

Bryan was solid, dependable, loyal, and generous. Bryan did everything right and stuck by the rules – just ask father-in-law Tom Clancy and members of the Curraghgour Boat Club where he was Secretary. While no doubt saddened by news of Bryan’s death, there are no doubt a few market traders in Killaloe and a couple of Garda sergeants out there who will be a little relieved. Bryan will no longer be “on their case” about where the rules say stalls can be pitched or why cars can park up on the pavement and cause obstruction!!

Physically strong – Bryan tried to pull the 9th bell out of the tower at Mount St. Alphonsus and the associated damage needed winches to sort out. He placed a 1.5 cwt shower tray on a bed of cement in my house with no help and only one chance to get it right.

Active – Bryan did so much for all, including the residents of Palliser house where he was “manager”, the Boat club where he improved many of the facilities, and the Bell tower.

Competitive – Nothing pleased Bryan more than “coming first” in Bellringing competitions.

A truly enjoyable person to meet and know - Bryan made a difference to all he met because of his character. He was that “dependable rock” who had a code of life and a personal disposition which made him readily liked.

Bryan’s passing means a very big light has gone out in our lives. But all our memories will keep a beam shining for a very long time.

Thank God we were privileged to know him!!

M J Pomeroy
22/07/2010