



Obituary

Aubrey Fielding

27th December 1931 - 16th January 2024



The surname 'Fielding' is synonymous with The Parish of Templemore and Saint Columb's Cathedral. The Fielding name has appeared in the Cathedral records for over 100 years.

And when we mention the name of Aubrey Fielding it would take quite a number of hours to allow us to talk about all of the aspects of Cathedral, City and Community life in which Aubrey was engaged during the last 92 years.

Aubrey Dukes Fielding was born on 27th December 1931. He was the fourth of six sons born to George Fielding of Dublin and Florence Henderson of Kilskeery. His parents lived at 116 Fountain Street, Londonderry. Aubrey's siblings were Arthur, George, John, Raymond and Maurice.

Aubrey was baptised in this Cathedral Church on 13th March 1932 by The Reverend David Joseph McClure, the Curate-assistant. From a very early age Saint Columb's Cathedral Choir played a significant part in the life of Aubrey and of his brothers, and later in the life of his four sons.

At one time all six brothers were members of the Choir at the same time. When Aubrey was 5 years old he approached the Organist, Mr John T Frankland, to be enrolled. Mr Frankland asked him, "Are you married?" and then told Aubrey to come back when he was. This did not deter Aubrey and he was admitted as a chorister on 10th January 1938 (86 years ago). He served under ten organists and could relate many stories about each one of them. He moved from the Boys' Choir when he was 18 years old and became an Alto in the Men's Choir. When he retired from the Choir he had served as an Alto for 72 years and 9 months. What a record!

Another area of Cathedral life in which Aubrey was engaged for much of his life was Bell Ringing. He joined the team of bell ringers in 1948. It was obvious that he was a competent ringer and was enrolled on 26th March 1951. Up until a few weeks ago – 75 years later - Aubrey was still ringing the bells. During his time 37 people were trained by Aubrey – some were able to master the technique and others just did not have the skills or the determination to continue. For services to bell ringing in Northern Ireland, Aubrey was awarded the M.B.E. And perhaps one of his proudest moments in recent times was ringing the Cathedral bells for the service to mark the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III on 5th May 2023. He was delighted to have been interviewed on that

occasion for the national media.

Aubrey was a founder member of the Cathedral Men's Society and was its Treasurer for many years; also enjoying the occasional outings and Breakfasts and Dinners during the year.

Aubrey was a member of the first 'Young People's Vestry' in the Cathedral and served as churchwarden for a year. Another proud moment was when he was commissioned as a Parish Reader and would assist at Choral Matins and Choral Eucharist. He would also read the Daily Office on Thursday and Friday morning. In this ministry he was a great help to me and to the previous Deans.

In 1987, on the death of Sydney Haslett, Aubrey took up a post in The Derry Rural Deanery Youth Project where he continued into the Millennium putting the Cathedral Records of Births, Marriages and Deaths onto computer and creating a database.

He became very competent in this work and got to know a lot of people who contacted him seeking information about their family history. 37 years later, his initial work continues to bring family history alive for many people.

I know that another area of parish life in which he played a very active part was in the Church Savings Scheme. This scheme, now long closed, encouraged many families and individuals to save, and Aubrey's involvement was a key part of this.

Aubrey was a life-long member of this Parish, and he had a great love for this Cathedral and would often put someone half his age to shame. I was privileged to assist him with cleaning and tidying the Chancel a few months ago and whenever I looked around, he was away to the Basement Toilets with flower holders and oasis. His particular task when it came to a major cleaning of the Cathedral in preparation for some important services was to polish the 250 pew heads. I can still see him polishing the pew heads with 'wood silk' polish. Aubrey's life story shows that he was a very busy man, involved and interested in so many different aspects of life in this Cathedral and City. Outside of Cathedral life he was an active member of St John Ambulance Brigade in the 1950's. A member of the Cathedral Cub Pack and Scouts. A keen supporter of Everton Football team. He also played hockey for the Cathedral teams and remembers tough opposition on the pitch from – believe it or not – members of the clergy team!

He was a local runner and ran in various Northern Ireland events. It is good to note that his grandson Christopher is following in his footsteps, and we wish Christopher well in his forthcoming endeavors for Northern Ireland later this month. Another important part of Aubrey's busy life was his association with Londonderry Probus for which he was awarded a lifelong membership on his 90th birthday. His involvement with City life found him on the Board of Directors of Derry Youth and Community Workshop; and he also was a volunteer since 2005 in Foyle Child Contact Centre. Aubrey had a good circle of friends, including James Stewart who collected him for Probus meetings on a Wednesday morning; and Robert McGonigle who collected him on a Friday morning for coffee and

a scone when they 'sorted out' the affairs of the world, the city and the Cathedral!

Another of Aubrey's pleasures was to 'go for a wee run' to enjoy the coffee and refreshments in many of the cafes. A popular destination would be Muff Glen or Three Trees in Lough Foyle where he would look out for red squirrels or ringed plovers. His interest in nature and bird life was also closer to home with his own blackbirds in his garden that reacted favorably to his voice.

Aubrey, although 92 years old, was very much young at heart. He had a spritely step and only for the misfortune of his heart attack a short while ago he would, I believe, have been entertaining us with stories and fellowship for some years to come.

To return to the beginning of Aubrey's life story: He received his early primary education at the Cathedral Schools with Mr Beattie and when it came to him leaving school, he was sent to Miss Loughrey's classes for a shorthand and typing course. He gained employment as a trainee shirt cutter in McIntyre, Hogg, and Marsh City Factory. He later moved to Hogg and Mitchells' Shirt Factory, eventually becoming Manager at Rosemount Factory.

When I visited Aubrey in hospital on last Friday it was fascinating listening to him recalling his working experience in the shirt factories of this City. It was in Hogg and Mitchell's Shirt Factory that Aubrey caught the eye of a young lady named Elizabeth. A rather long courtship lasting 80 months followed, and Aubrey and Elizabeth were married in Faughan Reformed Presbyterian Church, during the annual shirt factory holidays, on 6th August 1966. Elizabeth and Aubrey were blessed with four sons: Stephen, John, Andrew and James; Four daughters-in-law: Julia, Anona, Nancy and Heather; Four granddaughters: Beth, Sarah, Emily and Lily; and four grandsons: Christopher, William, Ian and Jakob.

To all of you we express our sympathy on the death of a much-loved husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather.

I know that you will have many memories of Aubrey and I hope that they will bring you comfort in the days that lie ahead.

Many tributes have been posted on the Cathedral Facebook page since the news of Aubrey's death was shared. And in many of the comments one word stands out. That word is encourager or encouragement.

To many people who knew him Aubrey Fielding was someone who encouraged; whether it was in the Choir with younger members starting out in life or just taking time to stop and talk with someone on a Sunday morning.

These small gestures were important and are what many people remember today when they mention the name of Aubrey Fielding.