

Celebrating the Life of
John Clifford Riley

1st December 1930 - 12th March 2017



Weston Road Cemetery Chapel
Wednesday 29th March 2017 at 11.00 am
Conducted by Steve Stacey, Civil Celebrant



Steve Stacey

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Celebrating the Life of

John

Weston Road Cemetery

Wednesday, 29th March 2017 at 11.00 a.m.

*Followed by
The Committal
At the Graveside*

Conducted by
Steve Stacey - Civil Celebrant

Entrance Music
Tchaikovsky: 1812 Overture Finale

Welcome & Introduction

Welcome here today as we meet to celebrate John's life, to pay our respects to him and of course to comfort and support each other in our loss.

We meet to share our memories of him, our stories about him, our love for him and to share our grief at losing him.

John was unique – there's never been anyone like him before and there never will be again.

He was a kind and caring, generous man. He was amazingly patient.

He was a private person who kept his emotions to himself and didn't talk much about his past. He was a serious person too.

He had a warm nature. He was full of jokes – he never tired of telling them to his family – they groaned each time that they heard them, especially as he could never tell them very well!

He had a very good work ethic. He liked pottering about was always busy.

He was proud and independent.

His family are his proudest achievement in life.

Our hearts go out to Peter and Susan – they have lost the cornerstone of their family. He thought the world of his grandchildren, Michael and Caroline.

His family are the amazing legacy that he leaves behind and a marvellous testament to the love of Kathleen and John.

We take a moment to remember Kathleen – the pair were best friends, soul mates and did so much together.

We think too of Pat and Mary. They've lost an irreplaceable part of their family.

Each one of you has lost a special part of your own life.

There is never a good time to die or a good way to die. We want the people that we love to be with us always, happy and healthy.

His passing is a reminder that like all living things, we're only here for a moment. That moment is never long enough for those who love us.

Our service for John has been created by his family so that we can celebrate his life and everything that he leaves behind, rather than simply focus on our loss.

I hope that as we go through the service you feel that it reflects, respects and honours the John that you knew and loved.

Tributes

During the next few moments we're going to share some of the love and esteem that his children have for him.

Who was Dad?

For Susan and I, he was our hero, a loving father and husband, a guardian, a provider. Dad was a voice of reason and comfort when we were confused and troubled. Someone whose opinion you could rely upon as sound. Never brash, or loud, but considered in his judgements.

There didn't seem to be anything, or anyone that he couldn't explain. He understood and instilled the value of a hard work and a comprehensive education and was always delighted to share his knowledge. He would spend hours, often in vain, explaining the intricacies of mathematics, algebra and trigonometry.

Of course, we never really appreciated his innumerable gifts. We took them all too much for granted, as children do and he knew that this is how it should be. During the good times and indeed the leaner ones, he and Mum made sure that we wanted for nothing.

When Susan and Andrew married and had their own children, Michael and Caroline, he was immensely proud and revelled in his new role as a Grandfather and I

remember that even when Michael was very young, out came the abacus and there was Dad, patiently explaining numbers.

Family was most important to Dad and he loved his brother and his sisters and their families. He felt deeply, the tragedy of losing Betty and Albert, more recently, Jan and John, Maureen's husband, Ken and also his nephew Michael.

Although, Dad immensely enjoyed his years in the design office at Kodak, I believe his real love was during his time as a Tool Maker and he continued to employ that skill while scatch building engines and rolling stock for his beloved model railway, which filled the loft and later, expanded into what was previously Susan's bedroom and at one time seemed be in fear of taking over the whole house.

Some thirty years ago I met a chap at work, a friend of Dad's, who had previously worked with him in the drawing office at Kodak. He looked over some of my work and said, "Yep! Pretty good! But, you've a fair way to go before you become as good as your Dad". He said this in front of others and I remember feeling very proud and would have been disappointed if he had said anything other. I mentioned this to Dad and he seemed a little embarrassed and said quietly, "That was nice of him". Dad knew how good he was. That was enough for him.

The final years of Dad's life were not easy. He lost the love of his life, our mum, Kathleen in early 2014. He broke his hip a year or so later, an injury from which, in spite of being fitted with replacement hip joints, he never fully recovered. He also suffered from other problems with his legs, but I never heard him complain.

In fact, such was his quiet strength, he never complained about anything, other than wistfully remembering how much he missed and loved mum and the times they had together, which was, of course, the most grievous injury he suffered. It was typical of the man, that when mum passed away, he said to me, "I keep feeling guilty that I never did enough".

When recently, when we were sadly informed by the doctors that when they discovered the cancer, the disease was too advanced and there was nothing further that could be done to arrest it, he just smiled and said "It's okay. I've done pretty much everything I wanted to do. I've been very lucky".

Even during his final weeks he never lost his sense of perspective, fun and the ridiculousness of it all, something which fondly engaged him with his doctors and nurses.

A few days ago, I received a phone call from Nurse Hillary at the Chells Surgury. Hillary treated Dad's ulcerated calves during the middle of last year and she expressed her sorrow at hearing of Dad's passing and told me how it made her day when he visited. Despite his obvious pain, he always had a joke and a cheery

disposition. For Susan and I, that was nothing unusual. As he never tired of reminding us, "I strive to make at least one person smile, every day".

Never judgemental of others or spiteful, Dad was a loving, brave, generous, fun loving and gentle man, and perhaps that is the most fitting epitaph.

I began with how we never fully appreciated Dad when we were children. I hope, I believe that he knows and that he always knew just how much he was loved by all of us.

John was proud of his service with the Fleet Air Arm. I want to share some words that are based on a poem by Lawrence Binyon. You will often hear them spoken around Remembrance Day. The words are in your Order of Service – I'd like you to join me in saying the pledge at the end of it.

We Will Remember John

In the rising of the sun and it's going down,
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
In the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring.
In the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer,
In the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn.
At the beginning of the year and when it ends,
When we are weary and in need of strength,
When we are lost and sick of heart,
When we have joys and special celebrations we yearn to share,
So long as we live, he too shall live, for he is part of us.

We will remember John



John's Story

John was born in Willesden on the 1st December 1930 to James and Eva Riley.

The couple had 5 children altogether John, Pat, Mary, Betty and Janet.

John grew up in West London.

He was private and shy as a child. He did remember that there was a bus stop near where he lived. Whenever it snowed, he would find a hiding place with his friends and ambush the queue of passengers with a barrage of snowballs.

During the war he could have been quite an entrepreneur. It was during a time of strict rationing. He kept chickens and would help his neighbours eke out their meagre rations of eggs.

No doubt he was fascinated by the dogfights going on in the skies above him in 1940 and like most boys would have collected shrapnel to swap the next morning.

He was a bright and clever child who was particularly good at mathematics. He always brought home exemplary school reports, despite so much of his schooling being disrupted during the war.

The war affected his family. He had a cousin who was a bus conductress who was tragically killed when a V1 Doodlebug bomb landed.

He left school when he was 14 and worked alongside his father. He worked alongside his father and became a very skilled toolmaker.

He joined the Fleet Air Arm when he was 18. Despite being called up for his National Service, he enjoyed his time there and served on the carrier HMS Illustrious. He was part of the fire team that would be on hand for any mishaps.

He was there for about 2 years.

He met Kathleen at a wedding. His sisters dragged him there. Kathleen saw him dancing with a girl and wouldn't believe it first of all when he said that he was dancing with his cousin.

He walked home that night. Romance blossomed. They started going out together and the rest, as they say is history.

They were married on the 4th June 1955 at St Mary Magdelene Church in Willesden. Eddie Calvert was Number One in the charts with Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White.

They started their married life living in London.

It was a difficult time – Kathleen developed TB and was hospitalised for many months.

Peter arrived in 1957 and Susan in 1958.

John found a job with English Electric in Stevenage. In those days, a job came with a house and the family moved into 28 Anderson Road in Chells, Stevenage. It was brand new, the road was unmade, pavements unlaid and the garden was like a building site. The house overlooked parkland and fields and for John and his family it was like moving to the countryside.

Family holidays hold special memories for his family. They would go on caravan holidays and to Pontin's on the East Coast. In those days, it was the time of Hi-Di-Hi holidays. He joined in some of what was going on – Susan remembers her dad in Knobbly Knees and fancy dress competitions. She remembers him dressing up as a horse owner with a top hat, while she was the jockey on a horse.

Later on they would go to holiday camps in the West Country.

In the early 1970's the family went on holiday to Mallorca with Mary and her family.

John enjoyed being a father and gave his children some lovely memories. Susan remembers how giving he was of his time when he supported her throughout her horse riding days.

John always had a passion for railways. In the early 70's John took his son to Bassingbourne where he stood on the footplate of the Royal Scot. Peter remembers that John enjoyed filming with Super 8 cameras. Peter and he would do 2 camera shoots of steam trains going through Stevenage. Peter remembers travelling on the Flying Scotsman on a holiday to Exmouth.

After the film shoots, John would sit with the processed film and edit it at the dining table.

Later on, John built an 'N' gauge model railway in his loft and would spend hours there. After Susan left home, he made sure that she couldn't come back... he built a large 'OO' scale layout in her bedroom. It was very detailed and he would spend hours and hours making sure that everything had a GWR feel about it and that it was authentic.

John was a hard worker, but took voluntary redundancy from Kodak when he was 58. Kathleen took redundancy about the same time.

It meant that he was able to spend time with his wife and grandchildren when they arrived. They often took Michael and Caroline to see the animals at Standalone. They lived just around the corner and were able to share their growing up.

His sense of humour reflected in the TV that he liked to watch. He liked classic British comedy as well as films with greats like Buster Keaton, the Keystone Cops and Charlie Chaplin. He liked to watch Ealing Comedies and Carry On films too. He had a broad sense of humour and appreciated the more modern anarchic humour of programmes like the Young Ones and more recently Mrs Browns Boys.

John passed away on the 12th March.

I hope that you can take comfort in the fact that he had a good life and a life he enjoyed. He was able to spend his life with the woman that he loved. He leaves behind that wonderful legacy of family, friends and some great memories.

We're going to listen to a song that reflects his taste in classical and operatic music. John loved music and even played the piano. A favourite was the music of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Back in the day he often went to the Royal Albert Hall. When he was courting, he would take Kathleen to watch a performance... she'd rather have been at the cinema and told him after standing in a queue for a while – they ended up watching a film!

Perhaps this is what she missed!

Music for Reflection

*Gilbert and Sullivan – The Pirates of Penzance:
I Am The Very Model Of A Modern Major-General – John Reed*

I am the very model of a modern Major-General,
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical,
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.

I'm very good at integral and differential calculus;
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous:
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

I know our mythic history, King Arthur's and Sir Caradoc's;
I answer hard acrostics, I've a pretty taste for paradox,
I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus,
In conics I can floor peculiarities parabolous;
I can tell undoubted Raphaels from Gerard Dows and Zoffanies,

I know the croaking chorus from The Frogs of Aristophanes!
Then I can hum a fugue of which I've heard the music's din afore,
And whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense Pinafore.

Then I can write a washing bill in Babylonian cuneiform,
And tell you ev'ry detail of Caractacus's uniform:
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

In fact, when I know what is meant by "mamelon" and "ravelin",
When I can tell at sight a Mauser rifle from a javelin,
When such affairs as sorties and surprises I'm more wary at,
And when I know precisely what is meant by "commissariat",
When I have learnt what progress has been made in modern gunnery,
When I know more of tactics than a novice in a nunnery –
In short, when I've a smattering of elemental strategy
You'll say a better Major-General has never sat a gee.

For my military knowledge, though I'm plucky and adventury,
Has only been brought down to the beginning of the century;
But still, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

Quiet Reflection

I'd like you to think about the things that you've heard about him today. Think about your own memories and how good it was to have him as part of your life - those memories will be every bit as special and unique as he was. No two of you will have exactly the same memory either.

Remember the times that you spent with him, times that you had a laugh with him, things you did together, perhaps something that he taught you.

Remember that he was very proud to have had you as part of his life too.

If you have faith you could use the time to say your own private prayer for him.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen

Closing Words

Each of you here will have your own thoughts about death. Some of you may feel that death is simply the end. Some of you may believe that we go on to a different existence or that we are reborn in some way. Some of you won't know what you believe.

Whatever your faith, it is in remembering that we live on in others.

We never lose the people we love. Be thankful that John was and still is a part of your life. For his family, he will always be a part of them, always be with them.

After the service you are all invited to the Susan's house. When you get there enjoy reminiscing about John. Enjoy laughing at stories about things he did and things he said.

I want to share some words that his family have chosen. They reflect the thoughts that we all have when we lose someone we love.

As We Look Back

As we look back over time
We find ourselves wondering
Did we remember to thank you enough
For all you have done for us?
For all the times you were by our sides
To help and support us
To celebrate our successes
To understand our problems
And accept our defeats?
Or for teaching us by your example,
The value of hard work, good judgment,
Courage and integrity?
We wonder if we ever thanked you
For the sacrifices you made.
To let us have the very best?
And for the simple things
Like laughter, smiles and times we shared?
If we have forgotten to show our
Gratitude enough for all the things you did,
We're thanking you now.
And we are hoping you knew all along,
How much you meant to us.

The answer is, of course.

In a moment we will be moving to the graveside where John will be reunited with Kathleen.

Before we do that, we're going to listen to a song that John liked. It was rare for him to like pop music; he heard this being played on the radio and liked it – Susan bought him a copy. It's Let Your Love Flow by the Bellamy Brothers.

Exit Music

Let Your Love Flow - Bellamy Brothers

By The Graveside

Feel No Guilt In Laughter

Feel no guilt in laughter, I know how much you care.
Feel no sorrow in a smile that I am not here to share.
You cannot grieve forever; I would not want you to.
I'd hope that you could carry on the way you always do.
So, talk about the good times
and the way we showed we cared,
The days we spent together, all the happiness we shared.
Let memories surround you, a word someone may say
Will suddenly recapture a time, an hour, a day,
That brings me back as clearly as though I am still here,
And fills you with the feeling that I am always very near.
For if you keep those moments, we will never be apart
And I will live forever locked safely within your heart.

The Committal

Sadly John's journey with us here has now ended. He is free of all of the cares of the world, free of all of the troubles of the world. He is at total peace.

John...

To everything there is a season
A time to be born and a time to die.
We have remembered your life with love and thanks.
We are glad that we shared our lives with you.
We will cherish all of the good things that you brought into our lives.
We will remember your character and your personality,
Your love of fun and your company,
The wonderful things that you did with us
And the happy time that we spent together.
We commit the memory of you to our hearts and minds.
With love and tenderness, we leave you in peace.