

Bob Swarbrick – Funeral Address

We are here now to remember Bob, known to us all in one way or another. Some of you will have known him for many a long year indeed, others for a much shorter time but we are here because our paths have crossed, our lives have been touched by him, and we feel the need to pay our respects and to say farewell.

Bob was born in Chorley in Lancashire in 1927, the youngest of four children. He was just old enough, come the end of the Second World War, to be called up and joined the Royal Marines, though fortunately much of the fighting was over by then. When he got back to civilian life he joined the family firm of butchers, the Chorley Meat Company. In due course, he met Hazel and they were married in 1965 and then PJ came along to complete the family. And talking of family, Bob was delighted to be a grandfather, even though, as PJ admitted, he had to wait quite a time for Aimee and the twins, Toby and William to turn up!

For some reason, now lost in the mists of time, the family was due to emigrate to New Zealand in 1967 but they happened to come to stay in Grimston to attend a Hunt Ball with friends, fell in love with the place and settled at Walton Fields. In 1972 Bob set up Grimston Saddlery, a business in which PJ later joined him, laying the foundations for her own company Bit World. Sadly Hazel was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1982 at the early age of 44, which was a really traumatic time for him and for PJ. He threw himself into his collecting, something which always gave him great pleasure. Bob's original collection had been of fire-arms, following his military interests, but because of weapons legislation he concentrated on something more innocuous – stamp collecting and postal history. In the 1940s he had bought a collection of Jamaican stamps and continued to add to it and research it thoroughly even to the extent of going to the island to rummage in the archives there.

When, due to unforeseen circumstances, he had to sell his collection he combined his military and postal history interest, eventually writing a book 'The Royal Marines Home and Abroad – A Postal History 1664-1994' for which he won an award. This gives an insight into the sort of person Bob was - if a job was worth doing it was worth doing properly.

Bob had not enjoyed good health in recent years and had a lung removed due to cancer some years ago. However, he maintained his social life and enjoyed a drink in the Black Horse, where we will be meeting later. Then his second lung showed signs of the same problem which meant it was inoperable. Even though he became physically frailer he was able to keep up correspondence with friends by email. He never complained and was always concerned for others rather than himself. And the family have asked me to mention how grateful they are to the folk at Dove Cottage and the staff at the Long Clawson Surgery and the Queens Medical Centre over this time. You will all have your own memories of Bob – a social chap, meticulous, generous in his friendship, happy to share his research, the sort of person whose glass was half-full rather than half-empty. And do share those reminiscences as we gather a little later on. It may help ease the sorrow you feel now that you see him no longer.

The second reading which we have just heard is not one of those usually set for a funeral, but was chosen because it fits well with the hymn we shall be singing shortly and with Bob's career and subsequent interest in the Marines. In it we hear of Jesus sleeping through a raging tempest and the disciples shaking him awake with the words, 'Teacher, do you not care if we perish?' The answer is that of course Jesus cares. He stills the storm and all is well. And he continues to care about each and every one of us and does not want anyone to perish. Our earthly life may come to an end but our eternal life will continue if we believe and trust in God through his Son Jesus Christ. Bob was brought up a Roman Catholic but, as some do, drifted away from the church over the years. However, latterly, he came back to faith and made his peace with God. So it is our prayer today, that Bob, who lived life to the full here on earth, now lives that eternal life and sees the face of God, not in a mirror dimly, as we do now, but in all its heavenly glory.

Rest eternal grant unto him O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.