

Stockton Unitarians



Paul Bell's Birthday gathering April 2019

Church News

Special Paul Bell Issue
March 2022



Blessings Prayer

After the invasion of Ukraine February 2022

Spirit of love, of light, of truth, of freedom

Bring courage to those who so desperately need it at this time of crisis in our world. Our faith challenges us to remember all those who have fought for freedom against tyranny. Our hearts go out to those caught up in the suffering that violence brings; especially the most innocent: the children and civilians everywhere living their lives peacefully.

Let kindness bless their lives – small acts of kindness that we pray will give them strength, that will ease their fear and anxiety, that will reassure them of those human values that even in the darkest times, can bring hope and resilience.

Eternal Spirit of love– illumine their lives, protect them, give them strength not to despair, bless them with encircling moments of kindness and compassion that can shine through and bring comfort even in the midst of great suffering. Let it be so. Amen



Paul Bell April 1925 to February 2022

Paul has been a resident of Sadberge for 60 years living with his wife Molly in Chapel Row. We all knew Paul in different ways many of you for a lot longer than myself

I don't think I ever addressed Paul as anything other than Mr Bell! He was a familiar figure driving his classic blue Peugeot or his orange Chrysler I understand that his Peugeot was an unusual model and he often had requests from classic car lovers to buy it, but Paul never parted with his treasured car.

Paul was involved with the organisation/ administration of several village charities, including that for village pupils who had been particularly successful, in their O and A level exams.

Paul was a regular attendee at the monthly Eat and Meet, and enjoyed the joint Christmas afternoon tea with the senior citizen church members at Haughton He always enjoyed his food.

I am grateful to all the people who have provided me with information about Paul's long and interesting life especially his long association with the sea.

Fellow sailor, John Tait, commented that Paul was proud of his long North Eastern sea faring family connections, claiming to be a relative of Grace Darling, as a descendant of her parents, as well as a descendant of Lord Collingwood, one of Nelson's colleagues at Trafalgar. It is understood that this is what influenced Paul's decision to join the Navy. That love of the sea never left him.

John only met Paul during his later years, but went on to say that

their conversations showed Paul to have had a fascinating and varied life. He was well-read and well-travelled. It's not many people of whom you can say, 'I learned something new about him every time we talked'.

After the war, Paul commanded a minesweeper, based at Great Yarmouth (late 40's/early 50's). Prince Philip was very closely associated with the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club (based in nearby Lowestoft) and raced from there during the 50's and 60's. Paul had met and served with Prince Philip, who was on Mountbatten's staff in Sri Lanka.

Paul's boat was called the Royal Sovereign, I understand that no boats could automatically be called Royal Sovereign, if a ship already had that name, but Paul's request to name his boat was granted. Given that Paul's connection with Prince Philip had been renewed might this have given Paul a means to make the request for naming his boat.

Paul kept his boat, a sailing boat with an engine, at Hartlepool Marina, frequently inviting people to crew and as well as enjoying sailing the North East coast. he sailed across the North Sea to Holland and beyond. John said Paul especially remembered sailing from the UK to Denmark, which was an ambitious passage in a small boat. The sight of the amazing dune structure on Denmark's East Coast had stayed with him.

NAVAL CAREER

Paul's long association with Sri Lanka began when he was posted to the Far East. He expected to go to Singapore, but Singapore fell. He

was therefore given a posting in Sri Lanka. Early in the war the Japanese had attempted an amphibious landing on Sri Lanka and the island was therefore reckoned to be a danger zone. One obvious alternative means of attack would have been an airborne invasion. Paul therefore spent his initial time going round various British air bases, organizing defences. However, when the early attack was not followed up, a posting on the island became quite an enjoyable one. He never saw action.

As time passed, others fell sick or moved on and Paul took on more senior responsibilities, which involved liaising with visiting diplomats, local politicians etc. Thus, he began to become embedded in Sri Lanka life.

Paul returned to the UK in 1947 and seems to have continued his career in the Navy for a while. His first posting was the “plum job” of ADC to the Commander of the Western Approaches. From there some officers would have expected to continue on to very high-ranking position, so why it was that his next posting was to the command of a minesweeper is unclear.

At some stage, Paul began to look to the future and it was probably his naval experience in navigation that led those advising him to suggest a career in Surveying, which has some similarities to map-making. This he followed for the rest of his working life. Paul worked for the firm of Hayton Lee and Braddock.

He was a member of the Chartered Institute of Building Surveyors and during his career became Chief Surveyor for the Diocese of Durham overseeing clergy housing.

SRI LANKA

John understood that Paul's return visits to the island began quite soon after the war and continued from time to time until the 1990's. David Whittington tells how, one Easter, round about this time, Paul was visiting Holy Trinity in Nuwara Eliya (pronounced "Newer Ailier"). In this 400 seater church, built by the Royal Engineers, the congregation sang some very traditional Easter hymns from Ancient & Modern, accompanied by an appalling electronic organ. That as David Whittington commented, "wouldn't even have graced the back room of a pub"

Paul noticed that in one corner of the church was a very decent-looking pipe organ, so he asked why it hadn't been used. The reply came, "Oh, the last time that was in use was when the Queen and Prince Philip visited during their post-Coronation tour"!

Being a practical man and used to making running repairs on the Sadberge organ, Paul volunteered to take a look. When he did, he realised that the deterioration was so extensive that it was beyond his knowledge. Quite a number of pipes had also "disappeared".

On his return to the UK, he therefore got in touch with David Whittington, vicar of Stockton, who was a very fine organist and, like Paul, someone who greatly enjoyed mechanical challenges. Paul's pitch to David was something like, "It would be easy enough to find some second-hand pipes and various other bits and pieces and to ship them out to Sri Lanka. Between us we could sort it in a couple of weeks with the help of some local labour." Ever the optimist!

In the end, what happened was that a friend from Stockton Unitarian

Church got in touch with David to say that their church was being pulled down and that if he would like the organ, he had a fortnight to get it out!

It turned out to be a really good Harrison and Harrison instrument. Having dismantled it, they were able to store it in a barn at Long Pasture Farm in Little Stainton, courtesy of John Barker.

Then came the job of shipping the whole instrument out to Sri Lanka. This was where Paul proved to be (according to David) an ultimate “Fixer”. He knew which string to pull and how to bypass Customs with the help of the Bishop!

The deal was that Paul and David would pay for their flights and that accommodation and keep would be provided at the Sri Lankan end. That hospitality was always generous!

In return, Paul and David were able to offer very generous rates of pay to the teams who helped them. Given the low rates of pay in Sri Lanka, it was easily possible to pay twice the normal rate, with a bonus at the end, without creating an enormous budget to meet. Watching Paul, David said, “All this brought out the best side of him. He proved himself able to get alongside a very wide range of folk – from the Bishop and Cabinet Ministers to labourers.”

Once the organ at Holy Trinity had been completed, requests began to come in from other churches. In the end, Paul and David made visits, during which they replaced or restored six. These included St Paul’s, Candy, where the organ was perched up on a twenty-foot gallery. Nothing daunted, scaffolding was brought in and a member of the congregation provided six lads from his coconut plantation. Used

to scaling the trees, they clambered up and down the scaffolding in bare feet. What was more, despite a lack of English, they showed an extraordinary intuitive ability to understand the process of what was happening. Pieces would appear from below with “This next?” and it would be just what was needed.

David is pleased to say that, to his knowledge, four of the organs are still in good working order, despite the difficulties that the pandemic has created in ensuring regular maintenance.

The frequent visits to Sri Lanka were always a highlight for Paul he often talked to me about those visits with great affection and his interest in and restoration of the organs.

Tommy said that it was those visits that kept Paul going and Paul was saddened that he wasn't able to make one final trip back to see all his friends in Sri Lanka.

Paul built links with the Anglican Church and became friendly with the Bishop and was treated quote 'like royalty ' for all he had done especially the organ restorations.

Paul was a long time member of St Andrew's here in Sadberge serving for many years on the Parish Church Council. Paul took a leading role in the restoration of the bells.

Paul, along with Nancy Hunter and Aunty Bertha helped to keep the Book of Common Evensong going.

Rev Robert Cooper has a fond memory of Paul as he came to Evensong each Sunday, Paul would always turn left to wind the clock.

Paul's relationship with God was important to him and during the last few years of his life he kept his spirituality going, gaining a great deal from the fellowship with the Unitarian Church at Stockton.

During the last few years of his life Paul was blessed with having a good friend in Tommy.

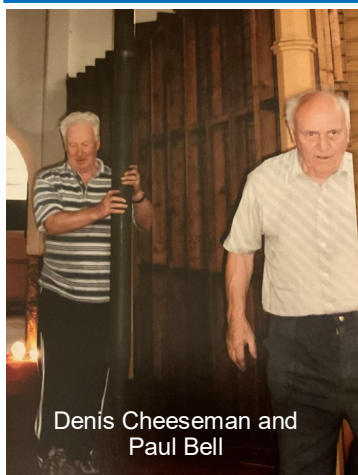
Tommy told me he first met Paul when he went to mend his roof, they soon discovered they had things in common.

Since the Covid restrictions began Tommy faithfully cared for Paul, cooking for him and seeing to his every need up to the end of his life.

Paul always was very fond of dogs and when his last dog Alfie became too boisterous for him, Tommy ensured that Paul was not without a dog for company, taking his own dogs, Dolly and Penny, to stay as companions every day.

Paul's life has been a long and interesting one, may he now rest in peace.

Rev Sue Chew, St Andrew's Church, Sadberge

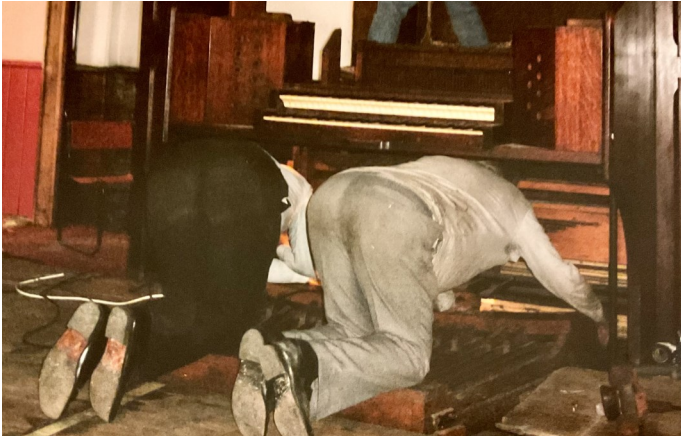


Denis Cheeseman and Paul Bell

Photos on this and the following pages of Paul Bell and others dismantling the church organ ready for shipping to Sri Lanka.



Men at work



Bums up! ?

David
Sickling

Denis
Cheeseman

Peter
Whitham

Edna
Anderson



Herbie

David Sickling

with organ pipe



Denis
Cheeseman
and
Maurice

David
Whittington
and Peter
Whitham
getting rid of
the dust



Parts of organ

**Deadline for next edition of Stockton Church News -
Sunday 20th March 2022.** Please send your contributions for the April
edition to the Editor Margaret Robinson at margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

Service for March and May 2022

Date	Time	Worship Leader	Flowers
March 6th	11.00am	Rev Paul Walker	flower fund
March 13th	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball	Margaret Kirk
March 20th	6.00pm	Membership service	Hazel Warhurst
March 27th	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk	Mrs Josie Squires
April 3rd	6.00pm	Christine Walker	Mrs Jane Tomlin
April 10th	6.00pm	tba	Mrs Coates
April 17th	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball	Hazel & David Warhurst
April 24th	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk	Margaret Kirk

Please note all services will be held in the church building. Most services will also be transmitted via Zoom, in a hybrid service. Joining instructions for Zoom will be sent out through email by the Church Secretary

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