



John Edward Knight Sylvester

29 May 1932 - 7 July 2016

A Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration for the life of John Sylvester was held at St Andrew's on 25 July 2016. The Service included Psalm 23; the hymns 'Love Divine, all loves excelling' and 'Guide me, O thou great Redeemer'; the Lesson from Revelation 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth ...' was read by Alan Sylvester; Eulogies were given by Hugh Sylvester and Revd Ian Welch; and Fiona Sylvester read John's poem 'Friends, do not grieve that I have gone'. The music reflected John's Welsh origins and love of all things connected with Wales.

Eulogy by Hugh Sylvester (Summary):

John Edward Knight Sylvester who was born in Lampeter a market town in West Wales, to Doris Megicks and Cyril Sylvester. The family soon moved to Surrey, where Cyril became the vicar of Send in 1945 until his retirement in 1970. John studied at Allen House Prep School in Surrey before he went to Lancing College on the Sussex coast. John excelled at sport at school whether it was as an inside forward at football, scrum half at rugby or as an all-rounder at cricket.

After Lancing John went up to Cambridge where he studied mathematics at Sydney Sussex College. In the 1950s he did his National Service with the Royal Signals, where he only seemed to speak about playing squash, football, cricket and cards in the officer's mess. His education continued with Theology back at St David's College in his home town of Lampeter.

One evening he attended his tutor's home when her younger sister Mary was visiting the tutor's wife. I would like to say that it was love at first sight, that he had a bunch of red roses in his hand, but when Mary, who was in charge of cooking the tea, heard a knock at the door she opened it to find a slim, sporting young man with a mop of black hair swept across his head, dressed in a bright Harris Tweed jacket, who simply pushed Mary aside uttering the romantic words 'Your toast is burning' and took over in the kitchen. John was to cook for Mary for pretty much the next sixty years.

In 1960 he married Mary and in 1961 they had twin sons, Hugh and Alan, followed a year later by daughter Fiona. With Mary qualifying as a doctor and John establishing a teaching career, the children often found themselves being cared for in



Wales by their grandmother and friends and family. John and Mary were determined to establish a suitable family home for their children and rapidly progressed from a studio flat in Peckham to a flat here in Mottingham, then a small semi in New Eltham before buying 12 Mottingham Gardens in 1965, which to this date remains the Sylvester family home.

John taught not only mathematics but religious studies and PE. He taught in Charlton, Woolwich, New Addington and finally William Penn school in Dulwich as Head of Mathematics. Not content with this, John embarked on a career as an author writing Mainstream Mathematics - a full set of maths books for secondary school up to examination. He updated these for the Heinemann Press when the syllabus changed.

John was not one for DIY but that hid his talent at woodwork and there is still furniture he built from scratch at No. 12. He was also a registered silversmith with his own mark, though he only made items for the family.

John travelled with his father Cyril, who would often take ministerial short-term posts abroad, particularly to churches in Italy and Switzerland in the summer. John arranged school trips, church trips and holidays for family and friends. The Sylvester Travel Agency was born and trips included Europe, the Far East and John's favourite, the Holy Land. In 1976 the whole family took a caravan trip across a dozen or so European countries, through part of the Iron Curtain, ending up in southern Turkey. Later John and Mary would travel to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Fiona has carried on his passion for travel.

His recent summers in Llangrannog were indeed a very happy time for him, despite his increasing reliance on oxygen. Over the years both he and Mary were accepted by the local community and received tremendous support to make their summer home as comfortable as possible given John's declining health. The last memory of John for many was in Llangrannog at my wedding to Sharon at the end of June. His health had declined significantly in the



preceding week but he was determined to hang on for the big day. He made it to the church service and thoroughly enjoyed the wedding. He spent the reception in our cottage at the venue watching Wales play football in the Euros – he had plenty of visitors. His improvement was to prove temporary though and when he passed away peacefully in his sleep at Glangwilli Hospital, Carmarthen he was back in his beloved Wales and only twenty miles away from his birthplace in Lampeter.

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Two of John's greatest passions, which took up a significant part of his life, were Freemasonry and the Church. **Jonathan Winpenny**, Past Provincial Grand Master for West Kent, gave a tribute to John's Masonic career, of which the following is a summary:

John was initiated into Freemasonry in February 1962 and was to go on to achieve high rank in several Orders. He had the pleasure of initiating his father Cyril into

Freemasonry in 1971 and it became an important part of Cyril's social life in retirement in Mottingham. Some ten years later he initiated both his sons into the Feltmakers' Lodge in a joint ceremony.

John was a Master of several lodges and often several times, and similarly in ancillary Orders. He fulfilled many offices in his lodges and often played the organ, injecting humour with his choice of music. His graces at the dinners following a meeting became legendary and he sold many books of them for charity.



John was a good ritualist and natural orator; but more than that his extensive theological knowledge and Masonic research meant he really did understand the true meaning of what he was saying. He presented many lectures to Brethren at meetings. He achieved high office in the Province of West Kent, including Provincial Grand Chaplain for seven years, during which time he was honoured to give the sermon at the annual Rochester Cathedral service. In 2012 John was presented with a Certificate to mark his fifty years in Freemasonry by me as Provincial Grand Master. He reached eminence in Freemasonry through merit, he certainly lived his life respected and assuredly his death will be regretted.

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Eulogy by Revd Ian Welch:

John Edward Knight Sylvester – a fulsome and memorable name for a man who was, is and always will be deeply loved and fondly remembered. It is indeed very difficult to imagine parish life without John, our Lay Reader since 1965, for he has given long-standing, rich and generous service to this parish. He was a loving and caring husband, Father and Grandfather and very much a family man, regarding the family as the foundation of his life and as a warm expression of the Christian faith he held so dear.

This foundation gave him a firm basis for a rich and fulfilled life in many spheres. He was truly a gifted man, being naturally one of life's accomplished all-rounders. He was a fluent and versatile writer of text books, prayers, graces, verses, historical booklets and of course, sermons.

In parish life John was highly valued as a caring and compassionate pastor, with a warm welcome and cheery word for newcomers, and wise insight into scripture and theology. He gave thought-provoking and inspiring sermons, and memorable amongst these were his annual 'motto' sermons based on pithy and illuminating verses from scripture, which he gave each New Year, as key-note meditations for the year ahead. He showed great dignity in leading worship, maintaining a reverence for continuity and tradition, combined with a warm sense of humour and genial wit.

John was a talented sportsman, a gifted musician - playing the organ, piano and violin – an accomplished cook and very hospitable host, a skilled silversmith, and a versatile furniture maker. Truly multi-faceted, John used his diverse gifts to glorify God, having an innately modest and unassuming outlook.

John's Christian faith was an example and inspiration to us all. His was truly a life well and fully lived, and he is remembered with great love, respect, gratitude and affection. John once wrote these words for our Diocesan newspaper, *The Bridge*, and they give a moving and fitting tribute to his deep and abiding faith. 'It is the teaching of Christ that matters. We can only learn of him if we regularly read his word, if we talk to him as a friend through prayer, offer to share our life with him by inviting him into our lives so that we may live in him and he in us. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is this message I have humbly tried to impart in my ministry.'

Thank you, John, for these uplifting words and all the blessings you have shared with us over so many years. May God richly bless you, and may you rest in peace and rise in glory!