

Biographical Record

Brian Derek PRICE (1924 - 2012)

Honorary Member of the Central Council from 1951 to 1954 and attended 0 meetings

Brian was born on 9th May 1924 in Tenby, Pembrokeshire, where his parents worked for the Post Office. He went to St Stephen's Preparatory School in Tenby and Greenhill School. In 1942 he moved to Ebbw Vale where his father was Postmaster. Brian read Mathematics at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (1943–6) and then a Diploma in Education at Bristol. He taught at schools in Appleby, Chichester, Brynmawr, Rastrick, Bognor Regis, Marlow, Warminster, Taunton and London. He gave up teaching in 1979 and worked part-time at Imperial College, London, in the Department of Social and Economic Studies and then on computer problems in the finance department. He retired in 1988, aged 64 and lived to 87.

Reading *The Nine Tailors* sparked his interest in ringing while at Cambridge, where he learnt to ring handbells with the Cambridge University Guild. In September 1943 he learnt to handle a bell at Christchurch, Ebbw Vale and was ringing Rounds in a few weeks. He continued ringing in Cambridge, and in June 1945 he rang his first peal, Plan Bob Major in hand. A month later he conducted his first tower bell peal, Plain Bob Minor at Chatteris. Around 1970 he dropped out of ringing, because he had developed tinnitus, which was aggravated by loud noises, but many years later he was persuaded to take it up again and went on to ring a further 9 peals in the late 1980s, bringing his total to 52.

Brian's major contribution to ringing was as a composer. While at Cambridge finding the book *The Theory of Groups of Finite Order* by William Burnside FRS launched him on a lifetime of composition. Early work included a novel odd-bob peal of Stedman Triples in 1944. While in Bristol, he used to wind coloured wool round pins stuck into a graphical representation of the courses, which baffled his landlady. His 1947 peal of 5090 Cambridge Major ending with a single was highly controversial, though now commonplace. Composing lapsed along with his ringing in the 1970s, but he took it up again in the late 1980s and had a productive retirement. He worked on Stedman and Erin Triples, on a series of novel tenors-together peals of Cambridge Surprise Major "the first new peals in the method since Middleton's" (apart from his own 1947 peal) and on many all-the-work peals of Spliced Surprise Major. He wrote monographs on theoretical aspects of composition, and investigated method construction, producing many new principles.

Brian became the first ringer to apply computers to composition in the early 1950s when he persuaded staff at Manchester University to run programs to his specification on the Ferranti Mk1 computer (the world's first commercial stored-program computer). He was also interested in ringing machines, and wrote a series of articles on the subject for *The Ringing World* in 1950. He built a machine using electro-mechanical telephone uni-selectors, but it was subsequently dismantled. His inventiveness went beyond ringing, and included a device to enable his lawn-mower to cut a circular lawn with hardly any human intervention.

Brian had a lifelong connection with Scouting. He joined in Tenby in 1941, was Assistant Scoutmaster in Ebbw Vale in 1942, and over the next 27 years organised many camps and expeditions, with Scouts in Cambridge, Southbourne, Brynmawr and Bognor Regis. He formed Brynmawr County School Scout Troop after disagreeing with the local Scout leader.

His fascination for caves began in Pembrokeshire and took hold in his last term at school, exploring the caves on Llangattock Mountain, which he revisited in 1946 with pupils from Brynmawr County School. His mapping and measurement led to new discoveries, and he published the first complete outline of all known caves in the region in *The British Caver*. In 1948 he returned to Llangattock on holiday for more excavation and exploration. His rekindled interest prompted a move to Brynmawr, where he taught for seven years, as well as working with young cavers and solo digging at what became known as Price's Dig. He carried out the first dye-tracing tests in the area, and opened up a new connection between caves. In 1956 he bought and renovated the Old Sunday School in Llangattock, as a base for many adventurous visitors to the mountain and its caves. He also played a key role in establishing the area near Llangattock Quarries as a nature reserve. In 1961 his inventive skills led to the development of a monorail system, with a tipping hopper running on a series of scaffolding poles joined together, which was used to remove spoil from Price's Dig.

Brian was a keen art collector, and developed a lifelong interest in the English post-impressionist Henry Scott Tuke. He bought his first Tuke for £15 in 1962 after placing an advert in *Exchange and Mart*, and went on to acquire 252 Tukes, which he donated as the Tuke Collection to the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society in Falmouth. He researched Tuke's life and produced a booklet of reminiscences of people who knew the artist personally. In 1962, Brian bought and renovated Quarry Reach, near Shepton Mallet, and constructed a special store upstairs to hold his valuable collection of paintings, including the Tuke Collection, while downstairs served as a caving hostel, and later a temporary residence!

From 1984 to 1992 Brian owned property in Tenby, and was a frequent visitor to Tenby Museum and Art Gallery. He was elected to the Governing Committee in 1986, and he became a generous benefactor. He watched sales catalogues for works of Tenby interest, and donated several books and memorabilia to the library and museum archives. He wrote booklets for the museum about Tenby life, as well as articles for *Pembrokeshire Life*.

Brian researched many subjects including the history of telegraphs and semaphores, publishing papers and booklets, or circulating manuscripts privately. He sang with church choirs and also with several notable choirs, including the Huddersfield Choral Society. He led a full and active life.

In 2011 an operation left him very weakened for the last year of his life. He died on 21st February 2012 in Hammersmith, London. His funeral was on 2nd March at the Crematorium in Kensal Green Cemetery.

An 80th birthday tribute appeared in The Ringing World 7th May 2004, p437-8.

