

Adrian's address at John Cole's Service of Thanksgiving, 5 May 2011

Where do I start to talk about the loveable musical funny gentle man who was my dad?

Well, loveable – because we all love him. And he loved all of us. He always saw the best in people. And somehow people were better people because they knew him. He was a great advert for Christianity – not ostentatious, just living rule 2: love thy neighbour. That sums up his attitude to people really. Dad was such a kind man.

Musical - I've never known anyone sing as much as he always did. Dad of course sang in the choir for many many years, in the Lee Singers, and later at the Cathedral. And he took the tenor lead in Gilbert and Sullivan operas at Price's. But he could make a song out of anything - such as how far do a short man's socks come up his legs. He clearly missed a vocation as a songwriter... I must get my love of music from him – though he never really got to grips with Prog Rock and couldn't tell the difference between Rick Wakeman and Mike Oldfield.

And then there was all the comedy – such a funny man. A home full of laughter and terrible jokes. So many years of shows at the parish centre, concerts and so on. Every five years or so the jokes rotated back in again... The French translations: "Ou est la place de la Concorde?" - "where is the airport?", "Je suis un petit cheval aujourd'hui" - "I am a little hoarse today"... I think he was actually the third Ronnie...

Sometimes he got to combine the music and the comedy, as in his party piece duet with Uncle Peter - the bold gendarmes. Always a terrible joke in the middle... The best moment was when he was the straight man to someone else's funny man doing the gendarme song, and his rather nervous partner said "I say I say I say, my wife's gone to Jamaica for her holidays". Dad just looked at the audience, and everyone fell about.

Dad always worked hard. And that meant that we saw less of him than of Mum as we grew up. Mum never ever used the "wait 'til your father gets home" line. But I remember the respect we had for him. If he spoke, we listened. Always gentle. But firm... All of us children remember that look over the top of his glasses, just as we were about to go too far...

And he always had so much love and respect for Mum. He'd refer to her as her ladyship, - or more often "femme bateau". They had a great marriage, and set a fine example to us.

I never saw Dad teach a maths class. But I'm sure that his easy charm and kindness, combined with a razor sharp mind and his clear approach of not standing for any nonsense, impressed all those whom he taught. And it was lovely to see how, at the end of his career, he thoroughly enjoyed going back to the classroom and teaching maths again. He genuinely loved teaching – a real vocation. And one of his pupils, Tim Hancock, sent a lovely letter that arrived this morning. Tim is now a maths teacher himself. And he says the jokes still work.

His best original idea was the saying about differential calculus "don't cancel the d's". I never forgot it and I think we should commemorate this by asking the Royal Society to name it Cole's Law. [... Another really terrible joke!]

Music and maths often go together. But he loved words as well. And he got me addicted to crosswords. Until the end, he still had this great ability to work out fiendish clues.

He never lost his sense of fun. So many holidays: playing cricket - he spun a tennis ball like you wouldn't believe. And the places we went... so many cathedrals! Wonderful holidays... And later when we all left home, got married and had our own children, he was always in demand. Come on grandad, the kids would say, and that was it - he was on the floor playing collecting rubbish, or in the pool, or playing football. No wonder he needed the odd afternoon nap! They all love him, just like the rest of us.

I'm so proud of my Dad. He was the nicest, most caring person I ever met. I love him very very much.