

**Sound file: 0035**

**A eulogy for William Carter, spoken at his funeral held at Gornal Wood Crematorium on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

William Carter was born in Gornal in May 1926. He was the sixth of eight children born to Joseph and Clara Carter.

Like many boys named William, he was usually called 'Bill' or 'Billy'.

As a boy he went to school in Gornal and Sedgley, leaving at the age of 14. Until the age of 17, he trained as a moulder. But in 1943, there came the call for him to serve as one of the 'Bevin Boys' at Baggeridge Pit.

His parents objected to this on the grounds that they already had three sons working as Bevin Boys, and stated that he should be given the chance to serve in the armed forces.

He was indeed given the chance to serve in the army, in the infantry for the King's Shropshire Regiment.

His service in the army included time in Normandy, Holland, Belgium, Cyprus and finally Palestine. He was very proud of the medals he earned for his service, wearing them on Remembrance Day and other occasions.

This is a memory from his nephew, Brian Carter:

“William was the brother of my father, Jack Carter. As a child I had fourteen uncles and aunts, but William was, and always will be my favourite ‘Uncle Billy’ - he had the ability to make you feel special. He met you with an engaging smile, took notice of you, and had charisma.

“He told interesting stories, delivered with that warm Gornal lilt. He will not be forgotten.”

Brian includes a story in his memory...

“When William was in Normandy during the war, his sergeant was in fact his uncle, Sergeant George Berry. Once a week, George was in charge of distributing letters sent to the troops from home, which always had the name and address of the sender on the back. Checking one letter, George carefully moved it to the bottom of the pile. When all the other letters had been distributed, George asked: ‘So, who is Private William Carter?’ Uncle Billy revealed himself, expecting to be given the letter. Why are you getting a letter from Louisa Carter? William said: “She’s my sister-in-law sir. She married my brother Jack.” “Oh really” said George, “Louisa is my wife’s sister...so you and I are related.

“How old are you lad? “17, sir” replied William. “You don’t look old enough to be in the army, lad. The family would never forgive me if you got hurt. So you’ll follow me everywhere I go and always be behind my back and out of danger.”

The joke William told was that he never saw action... just the back of George Berry’s army greatcoat!

In the following years Brian didn't see a lot of his uncle Billy but when Billy was back in Sedgley they re-connected and Billy told Brian about his early years in Lower Gornal with great delight. He obviously recalled his childhood with fondness despite being from such a poor family. Brian says Uncle Billy was always positive and happy, and really enjoyed life despite whatever it threw at him - especially if there was someone to listen to him.

On leaving the army, William went to work as a clay miner at Gibbons Brothers in Gornal. Later he worked as a painter's mate at GW Re-wires in Jew's Lane. Later he went on to work with his sister Mary at Fafnir Bearings in Wolverhampton.

In 1948 he married Alice and they had four children Roger, Susan, Rosalyn and Jane. In later years he married Mavis, and he was one of the few people to celebrate two silver anniversaries.

Here's a recollection from Mary and Vanetta of St Andrew's: "It was a Sunday morning in early February and we were walking along Bilston Street going to church. Outside, looking at the noticeboard was William. Vanetta invited him to join us inside in church. That was a turning point...William became a friend of St Andrew's from then on.

Vanetta writes: "Within 10 minutes of our meeting, he was sitting next to me in church at St Andrew's. It was a lovely day for us both, and we had many lovely days after that. William came to know Jesus and His love."

He was a very faithful member of the Royal British Legion, and proud to be a member. He would be delighted that there are so many of the Legion here today.

Later Vanetta, Mary and William made the first of what would become many visits to the children at Queen Victoria School.

It was a pleasure to sit with William and read scripture, during which he offered a lot of himself. He had a very generous heart and didn't hesitate to show his love for Jesus.

Other contributions from church members: "Every time I see a poppy I think of William. I think every lady in the congregation has received a poppy from William at one time or another!"

... "I always recall his happy smiling face, wearing his beret and proudly showing his medals. It was a privilege to know such a generous man."

Until 2019 William would attend the Wednesday lunches at St Andrew's. One of the servers says: "He was very appreciative of the efforts of the volunteers who prepared the meals and of the lunches he enjoyed."

"William was such a lovely person, always friendly and helpful. On Remembrance Sunday, virtually everyone wore a poppy badge sold on behalf of the Legion by William."

One of the activities William enjoyed at St Andrew's was the Arts and Crafts Group where he is equally fondly

remembered. Helen says: “William was a huge character, always happy and positive.”

He loved being the centre of attention, and would always insist on sitting at the front of the church so that he could say hello to everyone, on his way in, and again on his way out!

William was something of a celebrity in Sedgley, and would talk to everyone he came across. This was epitomised when in 2019 he was asked to officially turn on the Sedgley Christmas Lights. A helper recalls: “He was the centre of attention and in his element. The security team parted the crowd to allow William to come through in his wheelchair, and he was waving and shaking hands with everyone. We managed somehow to get him up the stairs and onto the stage, and once there we couldn’t get him off! He loved his reception so much that once he’d done his duty and switched the lights on and it was turn of the singer to perform on stage, we couldn’t get him offstage! He was having the time of his life.”

Elaine, another friend, says this of him. “Every week he said the same thing: ‘You look lovely’ How many ladies did he say that to?”

On one occasion a church member witnessed a magical moment when William and Betty from church were sitting at a church social event, and during the course of their conversation, they realised they were cousins. They hadn’t seen one another for many, many years.

William would make a beeline for anyone he hadn't met before. He always looked extremely smart and well turned out. Elaine would go round to his house on Sunday morning to check that he was OK to go to church.

William was very proud of his relationship with Annette at Queen Victoria School and the opportunity it gave him to meet the children.

He loved Christmas, and on many occasions he would invite people into his own living room to see the decorations. How many people would be crammed into that tiny front room?!!

Not only would he decorate his bungalow at Christmas, he'd also do the same on St George's Day and Remembrance Sunday. He would always give out Christmas cards, all signed with his customary 'Ho, Ho, Ho! Merry Christmas!'.

We must mention the charity walk he made from Dudley to Sedgley. A friend says: "I was thrilled to accompany William all the way. I expected him just to complete part of it, but he did it all. When he passed by a bus stop, he stopped for a couple of minutes to say hello to those waiting, who were delighted he had stopped to talk about his fund-raising efforts."

William had a great relationship with the Scouts at St Andrew's. He made friends with a lad called William, who then became 'Little William'. He accompanied 'Big William' on his charity walk from Dudley Town Centre to the church in Sedgley. Little William was in great

admiration of the courage and determination shown by Big William in completing the walk, and he continued to visit him until just before he died.

Here are some of the recurring words used to describe William: 'Generous', 'determined', 'friendly', 'concerned for others', 'an abiding love for Jesus'.

As his nephew wrote: 'You will not be forgotten'.

