OBITURARY

Basil Ewart Lord

19-11-1924 – 18-08-2018

(exactly 93 & 3/4yrs)

To fully understand Basil, you need to understand he was the only child of a couple, who met at the St Mary at Hill Church, Each Cheap, City of London.  It was an evangelical missionary church - the home of the Church Army (the Church of England equivalent of the Salvation Army).  His father, John Lord, a Lancastrian, had signed up for the Household Cavalry (The Blues and Royals), two days after his 20th birthday, in October 1914.  John was stationed at the Wellington Barracks, Kensington, and attended the church in East Cheap, where he met his future wife, Mildred.  They married in September 1918, and Basil was born within the sound of Bow Bells, in 1924, at the London Free Hospital - so technically a cockney!

After WWI, living with his family in Balham, London, his father (John) joined the Metropolitan Police, and while education was important, the salary only allowed for prep school.  Basil had to get a scholarship if he was to go to the best schools, north of the River Thames.  At the second attempt, Basil achieved that, and went to St Paul’s School, London (where the basic fees were £45 per term).  On the outbreak of war, his school was evacuated to Easthampstead Park, Berkshire, (as the school’s London buildings in London were Monty’s headquarters), which was the home of the Marquis of Downshire.   Basil was supposed to be billeted with a family, with two other boys.  It was decided there was not enough room, and Basil was billeted with the local baker, Mr Watts, which he considered a ‘jammy’ break.  During his time at St Paul’s, Basil learned to play squash, and had his first adventures in scouting. Basil achieved the entrance to Hertford College, Oxford, with a State scholarship, to study Natural Sciences (Physics).  This prevented him being called up at the age of eighteen in 1942, as the State postponed entry for university scholars for two years.

After two years at Oxford, Basil was called up and undertook his nine-month basic training, as a midshipman, at HMS Collingwood. After that Basil was appointed to HMS Blazer, (a converted holiday camp, Bembridge, Isle of Wight).  In 1945, Basil was appointed to HMS Consort, as a Radar Officer, for the RNVR Special Branch, based on the Clyde.  Special Branch because he was a Radar Officer, and radar was a secret weapon at the time.  He was with HMS Consort for her full acceptance trials and her transfer to Devonport.  Most of the crew were transferred to HMS Vanguard, to train for the Royal Tour of South Africa in 1947.  Basil was transferred to the Port Radar’s staff, Chatham Kent, during 1946.  He was part of the staff readying HMS Onslow for transfer to the Royal Norwegian Navy.  The Norwegians were keen to get back to Norway in time for Christmas 1946.  They made it!  He had some contact with the US Navy, at Devonport, as they did not have the radar expertise we had.  There were visits to US vessels. Basil reckoned if the ice cream machine broke down there would have been mutiny aboard those US ships!

VE night was spent carousing the streets of London, even though there was no official leave.  They had roll call the morning of VE Day and were told there would not be an evening roll call.  Basil, and a few friends, decided to go up to London, and made the roll call the next day, by the skin of their teeth, after taking the mail train from London.

After over two years in the Navy, Basil was de-mobbed to civvy street, returning to Oxford, for the Hilary (Spring) Term (1947) to complete his degree.  It took four terms to complete, and he said it felt like taking his whole degree in just four terms, after the two-year RNVR sabbatical.  While Basil was at Oxford, he was captain of the college squash team.  It was a third-class degree for Basil, followed by a year completing his Dip. Ed, which he failed.  He reckoned all he learned that year was how not to make the chalk squeak!

This mediocre achievement did not stop Basil gaining his first teaching job at Manchester Grammar School, as an Assistant Physics Master, in 1949.  He was known for giving pupils, who were really trying, but failing, extra classes, so they could get the grades they required. He also played cricket for the Staff XI and was a Group Scoutmaster.  There were four Scout Troops at Manchester Grammar School, and Basil ran the Chorlton Troop, where his nickname was ‘Buzz’.  It was the closest MGS Troop to his home. He took them camping each year from 1950-1954. They collected waste paper to raise funds to subsidise the cost of the annual camp.

Basil had been a Cub at St Jude’s Church, Balham.  He had been introduced to Scouts when he was at St Paul’s School.  Basil was in the 6th form, and a prefect.  One of his teachers wanted someone to look after six scouts each Sunday.  At Oxford, Basil joined the Oxford Union Scout Group and successively became Treasurer, Secretary and Chairman (the latter in anticipation of a planned visit by the Chief Scout, which was cancelled due to the Chief Scout Arthur Somers-Cocks' terminal illness).  Basil ran a Cub Pack while at Oxford and obtained his Scout Wood Badge (theory and in camp) and the Cub Wood Badge.  Due to the War, the training was at Youlbury (near Oxford), instead of Gilwell Park, London.  After obtaining his badges, Basil stayed at the camp to provide backup for the Scout Headquarters trainers.  Great preparation the Haigh Trophy!

While Basil was at Oxford, he was a member of the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (OICCU).  He attended a Conference at Hildenborough Hall, Sevenoaks, Kent, run by the evangelists Tom and Jean Rees as a Young People's Christian Conference Centre.  This was a where he met Mair, his future wife.  They married in 1951. In 1954, Basil made his next career move to Welbeck College, Nottinghamshire, on the Duke of Portland’s estate.  Welbeck College was the Army 6th form college - the graduates going on to Sandhurst.  He was Assistant Physics Master and taught some chemistry as well.  Basil was in charge of the rugby 1st XV and assisted with athletics in the summer.  It is where his daughter, Valerie, was born in 1955, followed by his son, David, in 1956.

In 1959, Basil moved north of the border, to Glasgow, where Basil was Senior Physics Master at Glasgow Academy, until July 1964.  “During this time, there was a move afoot in Physics circles to revise the Physics curriculum - not only in content, but in approach.  The Institute of Physics felt any change could be introduced more easily in Scotland, because the Scottish Education Department had control of the examination system in Scotland.  Basil’s predecessor at Glasgow Academy had joined the Scottish School’s Inspectorate to spearhead change through twelve Scottish schools, and had devised an Alternative Syllabus.”  Two people, Basil Lord and Bill Ritchie (Kirkcaldy High School), were invited as UK representatives under OEEC auspices, to join a month-long Summer School in Cambridge to consider the merits of a scheme devised by the American Physical Sciences Study Committee.  Their report1 was used as ammunition to gain funding from The Nuffield Foundation, which led to the introduction of Nuffield Science courses in the UK.

While in Glasgow, Basil learned of the problem of refereeing a schoolboy rugby match, while wearing his college white and green hooped socks, when his linesman was a Ranger’s supporter!  He also obtained his Article 39 S.E.D., which was Scotland’s equivalent of a Dip. Ed., and meant, at last, Basil was a qualified teacher!  Later this was to prove very important.  His predecessor, Donald McGill, suggested he would be wise to get it, as all he needed to do was write a dissertation, because Basil had more than adequate teaching experience.

In 1964, Basil and his family moved to Anglesey, as he had been appointed Headmaster at HMS Conway.  This was not an easy appointment, as he realised the educational standards were not preparing the boys sufficiently for the 1960s, whether they went to sea, or not.  Basil was only able to fully implement the required changes, when the school obtained Voluntary Aided status in September 1968. At that time, the Governing Bod was two thirds members of the British Shipping Federation and one third Cheshire County Council.  This is when it became important Basil had his Dip.Ed. equivalent.  No-one had heard of an Article 39 S.E.D., but investigations showed that Basil was a qualified teacher!  In State education, all teachers had to have this qualification, and some Conway staff had to go and obtain their Dip Ed’s, at Cheshire’s expense.  Sadly, as many of you know, and for many reasons, the main one being the ability of Local Authorities to choose whether, or not, they paid the school fees (and many choose not to), falling roles meant the school was required to close in 1974.

It was known in the summer of 1972 the school would close two years later.  Basil asked all the staff if they would stay for those two years, though he understood if they did not.  Most chose to stay.  In the summer of 1973, Basil was asked to apply for a job in a school which would have taken him through to retirement.  Basil declined as he felt it would be disloyal.   He had asked the staff to stay for those two years, and he could not leave after one year.  We (Valerie & David) found a letter written to Basil in 2005, from one of his pupils at Manchester Grammar School, to which he replied including the following comment about his time at HMS Conway, “*a*ver*y interesting time”.*

This meant when the school closed, Basil was given three options - to become an HMI for the Navigation & Seamanship schools; become a deputy head in a comprehensive school in Cheshire (Cheshire guaranteed to find employment for all staff members who had not found employment); or to become an educational advisor for Science for the Cheshire County Council.  Basil chose the latter and moved, with his family, to Sandbach, Cheshire - though by this time both his children were at University.  His work for Cheshire County Council was divided into two parts: firstly, as Secondary Phase Adviser for two of the eight County Districts, overseeing the move to Comprehensive education for Crewe & Nantwich, and Congleton; secondly, as the Science Adviser for four of the County Districts, seeking to encourage the Science staff.

Before taking early retirement at the age of 57, Basil had one interesting period.  Congleton was changing from a single sex Grammar/Secondary Modern system to a mixed Comprehensive system.  Two terms before this major change the Headmistress of the girl’s Grammar School retired.  As Basil was the only educational advisor in Cheshire, who had any secondary head experience, and neither of the Deputy Heads would be promoted over the other, he was seconded in.  Basil increased the male staff members by 50% and taught in a girls’ school for the only time in his life.  During this period, Mair found it advisable to send Basil to the Sandbach Saturday market, for the fruit and vegetables, as his pupils managed the stall, and gave him the best produce!  The opportunity came in August 1982 to take early retirement, and Basil took it, as he found the job was becoming too ‘inspectorial’ rather than ‘supportive’ of teachers.

After taking early retirement, Basil trained for two years to become a lay preacher in the Church of England.  He was admitted to the Chester Diocesan Society of Readers, was assigned to Sandwich Heath Church and served there until he was 70, in November 1994.  It was a ‘high’ Church, and not really his, or Mair’s, preference, so on retirement Mair and Basil found a Church more to their liking near their daughter, Valerie, who had a young family at the time.  This was at St Helen’s, Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

Basil spent the last 20, or so years, enjoying his Church life in the missionary minded St Helens Church, Wakefield.  He also enjoyed watching his five granddaughters growing up, though he had a very close relationship with Valerie’s three daughters, because they lived close by.  When Valerie was particularly disabled with Rheumatoid Arthritis, he made sure his granddaughters got to all the events they needed to.  He also introduced then to squash, and reckoned they were pretty good at it, commenting they must have inherited his genes!  He also lived to see his first great-granddaughter, Blake Olivia; but sadly, not his second, Harper Rose.

Basil found his last three years very trying, as after a short time in hospital, he was no longer able to drive (at the age of 91), have the concentration to read, do his crosswords, or have the energy to walk any great distance.  Basil had never had to take a driving test, due to having sufficient driving experience before the end of WW2.  Basil had the opportunity to have an hour’s free advanced driving, with the AA, at the age of 89.  The retired Police Officer told him was a better driver than most modern drivers, who had supposedly passed their test!  He also found out about the local speeding cameras, which proved very useful to his family!

Basil always felt he had had a charmed life for someone with a third-class degree, and a failed Dip. Ed..  He always believed if you worked hard, made the most of your opportunities, things would open up for you.  He always tried to help those who were trying, but struggling, to find something they were good at, even understand physics!.  He loved his years as Headmaster of HMS Conway, even though they were some of his most challenging, Basil found them very rewarding.