

Tributes and Reflections

Here are all of the tributes we received in response to a call to University College Oxford Old Members and friends for reflections and memories of The Reverend William Sykes, who died on 17th January 2015. An obituary written by Dr Robin Darwall-Smith, College Archivist, was posted to the Univ website.



A

Such a sad loss. I knew Bill very well indeed when he was training for the ministry at Wycliffe in the 1960s. As students at Oxford also (I a BNC chemist), we had encountered each other through St Aldates, and from those days I remember particularly he always slept with a razor sharp Kukri by his bed... I pity any would-be burglar!

At that time we founded what we called "the group", a small informal group of students mainly linked with St Aldates, with the purpose of exploring what the inundation of words we encountered in church actually meant in real life... words alone mean little. It was not easy... in fact quite difficult because they had impact... but the idea caught on and as the groups multiplied, I know Aldates' clergy got quite worried (feeling sidelined?). I sense that that experience might have sowed a seed for the discussion groups which he developed with such success as chaplain, and with which his books are linked. If so, it is tremendously humbling.

Returning from postdoctoral work in the US, we visited Bill in UCL and subsequently when he joined Univ. It was always such a boost to see him, full of energy and ambition for the work he was doing. We frequently invited him to visit us in Bristol, he never actually got round to it. Now I read the tributes he has received, I can understand why. Univ was his family and his life. We always kept in touch at Christmas and it is such a shock he is no longer with us.

Now I feel very privileged to have known Bill, a person whose life of service to others has been so fruitful.

(Dr) Eric Albone (1959-66, BNC)

A genuine and humble person who always answered the question "How are you?" with the word that summed him up: "Steady". He always seemed to me steady as a rock in stormy seas and his low-key presence and advice got me through some fairly unsteady times.

Dom Andrews (Lit. Hum. 1986-1990)

I am saddened by the death of the Reverend Bill Sykes. I was matriculated in 1998, and I still clearly remember that, at an event or meeting where freshmen were introduced to college officers and staff, he addressed to me in a very friendly manner. He asked my name, and I responded 'ah....Satoru'. He then said 'you are Ahsatoru, welcome to Univ!' (an interjection was interpreted as part of name).

On the other day, I went to the chapel with a visitor in the early morning on a weekday, not on Sunday, and the Reverend Bill Sykes kindly conducted a private service for us.

I can imagine that he is loved by many persons.

RIP

Satoru Araki (1998, Law)

We were so saddened to hear that Bill had passed away. We have only fond memories of Bill – from first meeting him in Freshers' week to the last time we saw him at the Gaudy in September. His smile and the twinkle in his eye always made you feel warm inside and brightened the gloomiest of days. Bill was so kind and supportive to myself and my family after I broke my leg in a road accident during my last year at Univ, and Matt and I were so pleased when he agreed to make the journey to Wales to give the address at our wedding a few years later. Bill, dear friend, you may be gone, but you will not be forgotten.

Nia Archer

Bill did his National service with the 2nd Battalion 2nd King Edward VI's Own Gurkha Rifles in Singapore. It was a time when we weren't on Active service. I was with him then as a Company Commander. He fitted in well with the Gurkhas. Being a well brought chap he was a bit taken aback by the bars and night clubs there when our doctor shewed him round.

Jon Aslett

B

Very sad to hear of Bill's death. Whether it was sharing a hot chocolate and a chat in my first, homesick week to chastising me for running across the quad to the shower in bare feet in February he just knew how to put you at your ease and make things better, for which I'll always be grateful.

Dr Susie Baker (née Henley, 1994, Psychology)

I was very saddened to hear of the death of Bill Sykes. In the current age where we try and measure the value of everything, Bill's passing causes us to reflect on some of the most important things in life that cannot easily be measured or quantified. Bill played a hugely important role in College life over many decades. Bill had an unusual ability to engage everyone in the College community regardless of whether they were involved with the Chapel. He showed a great interest in every

individual and always warmth and kindness to those in need. He also brought a sense of fun and humour to the College alongside his multi faceted pastoral role. It was always a pleasure to encounter the ever present Bill in one of the quads as one went about one's daily life at Univ. The College and all of its members were truly fortunate to have a man of Bill's qualities as Chaplain for so many years. Personally I valued his contribution enormously. May he rest in peace.

Tom Beardmore-Gray (1980, History)

I was saddened to hear from Univ of the passing of Revd Bill Sykes.

On my arrival at Univ in 1986, I discovered that the college had recently fitted electronic locks to the outside doors, which made it difficult for me, an orthodox Jew, to enter the premises on the sabbath. When I raised the matter with the college, I was referred to Bill Sykes. He was completely unruffled by what must have seemed a bizarre problem to a Christian chaplain. But Bill listened carefully and then made a couple of discreet enquiries before promising to 'sort it out'. Shortly afterwards, the college provided me with a manual key to use when necessary. His kindness and nonjudgmental stance in this and other matters made a great impression on me and will surely be part of his lasting legacy.

Rabbi Dr Harvey Belovski (1986, Maths)

Extremely sad news indeed – Bill was a delight to know and always had a quiet smile and perfectly positive pick me up if ever needed.

Warmest wishes to Bill's family and friends and the wider Univ family on hearing this sad, sad news.

Colin Bettison (1998, Maths)

I was saddened to hear of the death of my dear friend, Bill Sykes. The last time I saw him was last October for my 60th birthday, and he was in good spirits. I first met him in 1974 when I came up to University College London and he was Chaplain. During the 40 years I knew he was an inspiration to me and he will be sadly missed.

Roger Billins

Very sorry to hear the sad news about Bill. Attached is a photograph of my two daughters, Emma (left) and Alice (right) with Bill on Alice's DPhil graduation day in the Butler Room at Univ on 9 November 2013, a very happy occasion. Alice and Emma were christened by Bill in Univ chapel in 1986 and 1988 respectively. Although I left Univ in 1977 as an undergraduate shortly before Bill arrived, it was wonderful to be living back in Oxford with my wife Jane when both our daughters were born. We kept in touch with Bill exchanging Christmas cards and through periodic visits to Univ for many years subsequently, including Alice singing in the chapel choir for the annual Christmas carol service while she undertook her doctorate at Univ. We will all miss Bill's always friendly smile and jovial manner. Deepest sympathy to Bill's family.

Prof Jonathan Bowen FRSA, FBCS (1974, Engineering)

Bill was a source of strength and inspiration for me, as well as a (rare) squash partner, which gave him an opportunity to display the evil side of his almost uniformly good nature. The old saying about never playing backgammon against a vicar should be updated to include squash.

If people's worth can be measured by the amount and fondness of memories of them, then Bill is a veritable mountain of treasure. I cannot think of a better man to have been chaplain, and it was a privilege to know him for part of our journey through the mead-hall.

Paul G R Bowen

I'm enormously late in this, I'm so sorry, but hoping it's not too late to add a tribute to Bill Sykes somewhere.

When I think of Univ, one memory always rises to the top – the calm of the hour on Wednesday afternoons when we had our reflection group. It's only twenty years later that I fully appreciate the gift that Bill gave us: the powerful habit of paying close, careful and non-judgemental attention to a thought or an idea, and asking 'I wonder...' He understood, quietly, both the excitement of life at Oxford and the feeling of 'imposter syndrome' that bedevilled some of us – and how best to confront it. I was lucky to have known him.

Elsbeth Bracken (née Noble)

I was very sad to hear today of Bill's death. I remember him very well arriving at Univ during my time at the college. Bill oozed kindness and good nature and I appreciated his ministry then and enjoyed seeing him at reunions of various kinds since. He will go down, I am sure, as a Univ legend. My deepest condolences to his family and friends.

Simon Brindley (1976, Law)

My wife Kimberly and I met at University College (in 1991). We were engaged during our graduate years there together, and Bill did our premarital counselling. I still have fond memories of the conversations the three of us had, and I believe his involvement in our relationship not only started our postmarital life on the right foot (still married ~20 years later!), but also started me down the path of a more spiritually connected life, which has been important to me and to my relationship with my spouse and my children. My wife and I visited the college in the summer of 2012, and my favourite memory was running into Bill in the quad. It was very much a true flashback to our college years together and our brief (and sadly last) conversation is one I will always treasure. Thank you Bill for all you did for us and for Univ!

Dr Steve Brown (1991, History) and **Dr Kimberly Crouch** (1988, History)

Truly sorry to hear about the passing of Bill; I recently spoke to him briefly at a Gaudy and he seemed in exceptional health for his advance years.

Condolences to his family (and the College after his many years of service).

Ian Buckett (1992, Social Studies)

Accepting Bill's invitation to reflect throughout my undergraduate years ('95-'98) remains the single most important spiritual decision I've taken in my life.

Bill's extraordinary kindness and thoughtfulness had an impact on me that's hard to put into words.

His influence is with me still. And always.

RIP Bill.

We'll miss you.

Simon Bucknall (1995, History)

I was very sorry and shocked this afternoon to hear about Bill's death from Howard Sereda (who matriculated with me in 1973). I greatly appreciated Robin's obituary on the Univ webpages (thank you, Robin) – and I congratulate him on his choice of the passage from *Visions of Faith*: Bill was certainly not 'flash', but he was 'deep, quiet and [could be] very simple'. He certainly did not like sitting in the 'places of the mighty', but he was always ready with the 'friendly hand' and the 'kindly eye'. I have also enjoyed the various tributes. If there is anything in the paragraph below which is of use, please feel free to do so.

Unfortunately I did not have the privilege of having Bill as my Chaplain while I was up, 1973-78, but I got to know him through the chaplains' network soon after that, and through my many visits to Univ courtesy of Chris Pelling while I was preparing classes as a Classic teacher, and later doing my PhD on Jesus and the Gospels. I remember endless tea and crumpets in Bill's room (and more than the occasional sherry or port), and poring over his box files of various quotations which he had accumulated over the years which he used for his Reflections Groups. I kept nagging him about getting them published, and I was delighted to have played a little part in getting them to be shared with a wider audience through all the books *Visions of Faith*, *Love*, *Hope*, *Glory*, *Grace* and the *Eternal Vision*, published by the Bible Reading Fellowship. When I became a university chaplain myself, he provided advice and inspiration – and continuing hospitality back at Univ., where he also invited me to preach regularly, including for the 750th anniversary of Univ service in the presence of HM the Queen. He seemed to have endless patience and kindness, and enormous depths of belief in the people in his 'care of souls', whether or not they believed in his God. Since his retirement, we kept in touch and saw each other from time to time when I was visiting Oxford, preaching for his successor in Chapel or whatever – and he continued to be the same, smiling and friendly Bill, for whom I wished a long and blessed retirement. I am sorry that he has been taken from us so suddenly and without warning, at what is these days a relatively young 'old age', if that's not a

contradiction in terms. I am comforted that he is at peace, resting at last in the Eternal Vision of the Glory and Grace which he loved to talk about and share with so many others.

The Revd Canon Prof Richard A. Burridge FKC (1973), The Dean of King's College London and Professor of Biblical Interpretation

C

I met up with Bill when he was here in Perth a few years ago and we had a lovely time. It reminded me of why he is held in such regard and with such fondness by Univ staff and alumni.

Prof Robyn Carroll (1984, Law)

I first met Bill Sykes when he came to University College London in 1969, and got to know him when we both sat together on a VC10 returning to London from Nairobi in 1970. He had just visited the Serengeti Plains and I had been working in a Church Missionary Society hospital in Kaloleni, Kenya, followed by a visit to a Tutsi refugee camp in Mbarara, Uganda. He was then a member of the Anglican Chaplaincy in London University and I was a medical student at the Royal Free Hospital. He was a very influential man as a source of quiet wisdom in my life and was always a safe port in a storm. I have kept in touch with him from Portland, Oregon, USA for forty-five years, during which time I have introduced many of my friends and family to him, particularly my children. I was so glad to have had the opportunity to take him to lunch last April in the village pub at Cumnor, where he lived simply during his retirement years. We were always able to carry on where we left off. Bill was a man of similar calibre to C.S. Lewis, whom he very much respected. He will be remembered and sorely missed by hundreds of people to whom he gave wisdom and encouragement to lead a life of integrity.

Ian Cartwright MD. FRCA.

I first met Bill at the other University College – he began as chaplain in the same term that I began as an undergraduate. I got to know him through UCL's Anglican Society where he was, of course, a key influence. We became good friends and after I left UCL we kept in sporadic contact. We saw a fair amount of each other when I was Vice Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon (a theological college outside Oxford) and we even bumped into each other when I was flyfishing on Farmoor and he was taking his evening walk from Cumnor around the reservoir. We had not met up so much when I left Oxford to become Bishop of Tonbridge (though I did preach at Univ at his invitation a few years ago) but we did promise to catch up next time I was in Oxford. Sadly, it never happened.

You requested tributes from members of the Univ community. I would be able to send some from my UCL days if that would help. He was a man of deep humanity, deep humility, deep faith and great laughter. He will have touched the lives of thousands, many of whom will be in positions of significant influence.

Rt. Revd. Dr. Brian Castle, Bishop of Tonbridge

I did not realise that Bill was older than I. I knew him at a time when a few of Ampleforth's historians followed me to Univ and knew and admired what I heard of his reflection groups – and saw one of the visions of faith volumes. At a time when fewer and fewer Fellows were providing the invaluable and friendly resident adult presence that I remember so well in my time, Bill's importance to the College can hardly be exaggerated. Indeed he did give an impression of content and was, I think, an apostle. I remember in the volume I saw, he didn't have anything under the letter Z. I always meant to offer him an extract about Zeal, good zeal, from the Rule, and am sorry I never got to do that; the virtue rather exemplified much about him.

The Very Rev Fr Leo Chamberlain OSB, MA

I was at medical school in London in 1971 and first met Bill when he was Chaplain to UCL and part of the wider University of London Chaplaincy at the University Church of Christ the King in Gordon Square where he was Sub-Deacon. He was an inspirational Chaplain and took a great interest in all the students whether they were part of UCL or the wider University. He was renowned for his generous hospitality and even in those days he organised weekend retreats for the students. He had a truly caring nature. He was highly respected by all who came in contact with him. It was a great pleasure to meet him again when as a junior doctor at the John Radcliffe Hospital in 1979 I found that he was at Univ. And by another coincidence I found that he was still there when my son was in his first year at Univ in 2001 and again he was there on graduation day in 2006. 35 years of continuity.

Dr. Ben Chishick

Attending Bill's discussion groups in the early eighties with the opportunity to share ideas of a philosophical and religious nature was one of the highlights of my time at Univ – as well as continuing these on one of his chalet trips in August 1982. Bill was someone who believed wholeheartedly in the congregation of minds and his open-mindedness has been a great inspiration in my subsequent teaching career. I suspect he touched the lives of many others in the Univ community in like manner and his contribution to the continuing intellectual curiosity of Univ Old Members will have been a wonderful, if unimagined, legacy. Bill, you probably did not know quite where you cast your shadow.

Neal Clark (1979, English)

Such sad news. Bill was part of the college 'furniture' and it is impossible to think of Univ without him. The summer I spent on one of the chalet parties was a time of my life whose memories I still treasure, and his reflection groups provided a source of calm and comfort during the sometimes difficult times university life brings.

He did me the honour of christening both my children. I can't believe he's gone.

Grant Clelland (198, History)

I am very sorry to hear about the passing of Revd. Bill Sykes. He was one of the highlights of my time at Univ.

John R. Conway

I am so sorry to hear the news. Bill was a wonderful man, always positive, always caring and always giving good advice to students and Fellows alike. He played a huge role in the life of University College and he will be missed.

Dr Tony Coombs (1981, Chemistry)

I was so sorry to hear of Bill's death. Like countless others, I was an undergraduate who was profoundly influenced by Bill's kindness, wit and emphatic belief that his role was to be a support for everyone in the college. Three years in the Chapel Choir meant that I heard a lot of anecdotes about the Gurkas (and the sergeant who would discreetly tell him what orders to give) and his years at UCL ("the Godless of Gower Street") in the 1970s, but his love of Univ and of its students shone through.

His beliefs were not loudly trumpeted, but still firmly and passionately, if thoughtfully, held, and to me, as to many others who did not profess his Christian faith, what spoke loudest was his belief in inclusiveness. I remember remarking as a student that the most militant atheist would go to him with their problems, confident that he would not see the approach as an opportunity for proselytising, but simply as a chance to help a young person and comfort in an entirely non-judgmental way.

I was one of many students that he married over the years and was amused and impressed that he dealt with the requirement to "instruct" my then-fiancé and I by holding a "reflection group" for two over the subject of marriage, on the grounds, he said, that as a single man he did not feel able to provide any instruction, so wanted to look to great men and women who might have something to say and, more importantly, he felt that couples need to think and talk about the issues of marriage before the fateful day. Of course, his advice, to talk things over, was the best and most effective instruction anyone could give and my husband and I both fondly remember him as a central figure of that wonderful day.

I am extremely grateful to have known Bill and for all that he did for me over my time at Univ. There must be hundreds and thousands of us who all feel this way, which seems a wonderful legacy to leave.

Rosalind Connor (née Grime, a change in name for which Bill was responsible) (1989, PPE)

One of the English students once complained to me that too much literature was unrealistic in portraying good people, because he didn't believe any actually existed. I said, 'What about Bill Sykes?' – and he agreed.

Professor Helen Cooper, Emeritus/Honorary Fellow

Tribute/ Reflections about Bill

Sungei Patani. Who would know where Sungei Patani is except for Bill. He was stationed there with the Gurkhas. I was a little girl then who contrary to my parents' advice not to go near the Gurkha Camp, ran over there at the earliest opportunity. Yes the Gurkhas looked fierce, but they smiled kindly at my sister and me. I remember running back home as fast as we could once we had been face to face with them. We had seen the Gurkhas!

Some years later, living in Cumnor, I met Bill and Sungei Patani became our link. I was amazed that not only had he heard of Sungei Patani but he was there. But more than that. Bill was an incredibly kind and gentle person. He was always able to help me and others make sense out of life's 'non-sense.' I have been so very fortunate to have known him and I will miss him. Like the Gurkhas then, Bill too smiled kindly. Always.

Dr Gina Copp

Few may be aware that, in addition to cheering on college teams, Bill actually took part in one. He joined a rugby tour to Devon in 1976 and provided a passable impression of a prop, as well as a very convincing impression of a rugby tourist in the bar afterwards.

A really great man, to those of us who did not enter Chapel during our stay at Univ as well as those who did!

Dean Cowley (1974, History)

"I married all your daughters" Bill Sykes said with a grin when he came to lunch before Christmas and so he had.

We first met Bill when he came to Switzerland as a chaplain for Christmas, remarkably amongst all his other responsibilities he seemed a member of the family, always in touch always with a smile and kind comments. It was remarkable how he gathered all the strands of his life together, a skier, I was invited to dine at the University College High table, and no doubt many students were encouraged to ski!

We will miss him so much.

Elsbeth and David Crossley Cooke

So sad to hear of Bill's death. He was a good friend of my late husband, Guy Crofts who was Head Porter at Teddy hall until his sudden death in May 1999. Bill and Guy shared the same sense of humour! He was a great help to Adam, Mandy and myself during Guy's illness and after his death and did a great job at his funeral. We think and talk of him often with great fondness. Thank you Bill.

Wendy Crofts

D

I was not from a practising Christian family, but something in the invitation to freshers, received from the chaplain before I went up to UCL in 1975, compelled me to enquire. I met Bill, some other young pilgrims, the chaplaincy black cat called Satan, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Bill had no simple answers for questioning students, his faith was not formulaic, and he never judged. But he always asked the right questions. The Bible was important to him, but *'The Choice Is Always Ours'*, a volume of reflections and wise words, was equally so. Bill inspired in us a deep and abiding faith in God, and a deep and abiding friendship which lasted a lifetime.

Several years after I graduated from UCL, I met up with Bill again, this time in Oxford. As a graduate student at New College, I would often make my way to Univ for tea and a chat in Bill's rooms. When I married the then chaplain of New College in 1984, Bill presided at the Eucharist on our wedding day.

He has been an important and treasured influence in my life for forty years, and no doubt in the lives of countless others. He will be very sorely missed.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Vanessa Dent (née Linney. UCL 1975-78)

Bill will be sorely missed as a spiritual anchor at University College, Oxford. His services to pastoral ministry go much further however than the college lodge. His contribution to the art of reflection groups is now well known as are his anthologies of reflections. His most recent book 'A Still More Excellent Way', based on the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, ought to be on many a bedside table. Our nights will be less dark reading it.

Mark Dimond (1988, Classics)

I am very sad to hear of Bill's death. He was such a tremendously genial, sympathetic presence around college, with an enormous sense of fun (the only person, surely, who could get away with teasing George Cawkwell or Gwynne Ovenstone). It's a cliché, but he really did have a twinkle in his eye. He was interested in everyone – genuinely so, as that legendary memory for names and faces showed. Behind the scenes he calmly and discreetly picked up the pieces from countless undergraduate crises. Even if your only encounter with Bill was being schooled in reciting the college grace, it was a memorable one. My own memories of Bill are mostly connected with chapel choir and crumpets, and I would happily relive them all. What a character, and what a loss. Univ won't be the same without him, and I'm willing to bet that there will be standing room only at his memorial.

Josie Dixon (1983, English)

Bill was my friend and spiritual guide for 25 years.

He has had a hugely positive impact on my life in helping me to understand and appreciate the Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

I could thank him for 100 lifetimes and this would still not be enough for the realisation that he has helped me see and for bringing richness and “excellence” into “living in the moment”. For me, Bill continues to live on in a very real sense through his teaching and counsel. I find myself asking “what would Bill have said” when I feel like calling or seeing him and it’s as though he continues to speak to me in my mind and continues to help bring out the best in my thoughts and actions through his legacy.

I count my blessings for the highest privilege of having had Bill in my life. He is irreplaceable...

Roshan Daryanani

Tribute to Bill Sykes

I feel impelled to add my tribute to Bill, since I knew him at the start of his university chaplaincy career, as a student at University College London. I officially belonged to his “flock” between 1969 and 1971, for one undergraduate and one postgraduate year. Although most of my post-UCL life has been outside the UK, we have kept in touch through Christmas letters, and met up a few times.

As chaplain at UCL, he faced challenges very different from those at Oxford, and his courage and resourcefulness in meeting them should be remembered.

The ethos was totally different. I was, and am, proud to be a graduate of the first English university college to admit on an equal basis students of all faiths and none. However, UCL was secular in the French, not the Gandhian, sense. It was set in stone by its Utilitarian founders that it could employ no chaplains, and have no chapel, no theology department and no religious services. Chaplains were appointed and paid by their denominational bodies, but had no college staff privileges. They had to create their own jobs, and make contacts however they could.

A further challenge was the nature of UCL as a large non-residential college in the capital. It had as many students as most provincial universities, so Bill had no hope of memorising Freshers’ photos, even if he had been allowed access to them. Students in halls of residence could make friends easily, but halls accepted only a proportion, and the maximum stay was 2 years. Over half of UCL’s students lived in general hostels or “digs”, travelling to lectures on crowded tubes. There were certainly societies, but evening activities were limited because public transport stopped around midnight, and in some areas it was unsafe to walk late. Major issues were clearly loneliness, and lack of a sense of community.

Bill built up the Anglican Society as Church without a church. As a college society, we used a seminar room on the college outskirts for a Friday lunchtime meeting [actually Eucharist, but maybe they didn’t know!!!], followed by lunch together in the melee of the lower refectory. Sometimes the clerical collar produced comments like “Look out, it’s the God Squad!”, but I remember unknown students sometimes coming up to Bill there with problems or questions.

On Tuesdays at 4o’clock [before the commuting students went “home”], there was always tea and –yes–crumpets, dangerously toasted through the bars of Bill’s gas fire. This was in 89, Gower Street, Bill’s residence, directly opposite, but outside, UCL’s entrance façade. There was classical

music playing on Bill's record player, often the [Dies Irae](#) from Verdi's Requiem, which I will always associate with him. Reflection groups were in the future. We were in an institution where staff-student [and sometimes student-student] social contact was often minimal: we needed to chat and relax.

In the first week of every summer vacation there was the Pilgrimage, a great bonding experience, when we walked 80-100 miles from one ecclesiastical centre to another, talking, laughing, arguing, and getting soaked, sleeping in church halls on the way.

Bill looked for every outreach opportunity, and it was often up to us to introduce him to groups or individuals. He joined UCL sports teams and the [secular] college choir, where he had valuable encounters with people who would never otherwise have approached a clergyman. He went with groups of Ang Soc people to visit students in "digs" in Catford, Elephant and Castle, Kilburn. I remember knocking on doors to say, "Bill Sykes, the Anglican chaplain is in the area. Would you like to speak to him? -----Well, if ever you feel-----."

It would be exaggerating to suggest we in Ang Soc were a persecuted minority in the catacombs of Gower Street, but I do feel that swimming against the tide of UCL's secular ethos made for a special bond with our chaplains: they supported us, but we knew we also had to support them.

Of course, all sorts of "non-religious" people in UCL warmed to Bill. He combined deep compassion with a huge zest for life: qualities not often found in the same person. We must be glad that he could pursue his love of travel and the outdoors almost to the end.

He, and the student body, were fortunate in having 2 other Anglican chaplains working part-time with him in UCL: Father Simon Holden of the Community of the Resurrection, and Mary Ann, then of the Deaconess Community of St. Andrew. Bill's wisdom and generosity were shown in the way he worked with these colleagues, quite different in churchmanship and personality. Bill was not much older than some of us. His counselling skills were, I think, still developing, and sometimes students' problems seemed to affect him so deeply that he felt unable to cope. He knew when he had to refer a particular student on to a colleague, and did so without jealousy or possessiveness. In my 2 years in his chaplaincy orbit, several Ang Soc students faced challenging or traumatic situations which changed their future lives: Bill referred to some of these in his later reflection books.

For me, 1969-1971 included the darkest period of all my 66 years. It was providential that Bill, Simon and Mary Ann were all there for me. Simon was effectively my bereavement counsellor, but Bill's vicarious grief and the "hand on the shoulder" were crucial too. Because Bill was so strongly on my side, I could go on believing that God was, too.

As a teacher of refugees, offenders and other disadvantaged adults, and an Irish politician's wife, I have had a rollercoaster of encounters and experiences. But Bill showed me that, whatever successes and failures I and my family may have, there is one ultimate measure of success: how much one radiates God's love in one's world.

Katherine Dowds [née Hudson]

E

That is very sad. I only got to know him at Feasts and other events, but I know how highly everyone regarded him and what a loss he will be. He was devoted to the College and he was a truly loveable man.

Sir David Edward KCMG, QC, FRSE (1953, Classics)

I was at UCL from 1969 to 1972 and got to know Bill well and enjoyed (rather too many of) his crumpets on Thursday afternoons in 89 Gower Street, the Anglican Chaplaincy.

I recall Bill showing me a wound on his hand or arm that had been caused by someone he described as a 'CT' – a communist terrorist. He must have seen action, at close quarters, during his service with the Gurkhas.

Nick Eleanor

F

I was very sorry to hear the news of Bill Sykes death. I remember him well from my Univ days. Before we had even started as freshers he had memorised all our names (presumably from photos) and would greet you by name in the quad. It made you feel instantly part of the college.

My deepest sympathy to his family.

Nicola Firmston (née Steeds, 2003, Physiology)

I first met Bill in 1978 when I was College Doctor and he had just become Chaplain. As I had just been appointed to a GP academic post, I was made a Fellow of Balliol where he had been an undergraduate. So over the years we were able to compare the merits and demerits of the two colleges!

I remember our joint talks to the Univ Freshers. Bill would introduce us. "I am the Chaplain with the unlikely name of Bill Sykes and the job of concern for your spirits and Dr Fowler's job is concern for your body"! Between us we did our best.

From my point of view he was a wonderful College Chaplain – knowing everyone in college and caring especially for those in difficulty or ill. He was always there and he made the job of looking after the sick so much easier for me. At the time I was College doctor to six undergraduate colleges and I know how lucky Univ. was in the qualities of its Chaplain. His "Reflection groups" were widely valued and envied elsewhere.

Bill was also a patient in my medical practice and, although he rarely consulted us, he was always seen as a kindly man, more concerned about others than himself. And when I retired – and Bill a bit later – we continued as friends. My wife and I attended his Chapel services and when our younger son was killed in an accident 20 years ago, it was Bill who gave wonderful support, together with others in Univ, and conducted his funeral in Univ chapel.

Over the last couple of years, Bill lead a reflection group for oldies in our house, using his books and the model of his student groups for 6 - 8 of us in our 70's and 80's !

I saw him in the John Radcliffe Hospital the day before he died. Although he was very ill, we had our usual chatty conversation, including a few jokes about Univ. Then, when I reluctantly left, without realising he was so near to dying, I asked whether we should try to run the reflection group without him for the short time we thought he would be out of action. With a smile and a chuckle he said "Yes, with my blessing, and for a bit". We'll try.

Prof Godfrey Fowler OBE (1950, Medicine)

G

It was people like Bill who made Univ in my time – 1981 to 1984 – so pleasant a place to be. I was not a chapel-goer, indeed not a believer, but Bill was a friend who took an interest and stayed in touch. I last saw him a few years ago when he visited my current home, Auckland in New Zealand. I was also glad to have used an earlier visit from him as the excuse to have a Univ get together for Auckland-based OMs at my house in 2008.

What was constant from the early 1980s until my last meeting with him was humour, and invariably mischievous humour. This would turn on Bill's ready supply of admonishments based on the style of other College greats, George Cawkwell and Bill Warren. Almost inevitably, reference to a firkin of beer would make it into the mimicry before giggling took over.

Dearest Bill, it will take me a while to drink my next firkin, but I will be thinking of you and those dearest to you as I do so.

Kris Gledhill (1981, Law)

Many, many warm and happy memories today of dear Bill Sykes. What a lovely, twinkly, kind and warm-hearted man.

Andrew Glover (1982, Classics)

I was a student at Univ from 1990-1993, and attended a number of Bill's reflection groups and a chalet party. Later Bill married my wife Nikki and I at Univ. I remember him as an incredibly kind and selfless man. A generous spirit with a broad smile and a twinkling sense of humour. Accepting of other people, whatever their beliefs. Patient, thoughtful and a great listener. Spiritual in the best senses of the word. Genuinely interested in helping those around him. Passionate about the Alps, rugby and the Ghurkas. A thoroughly good man. The world was better with him in it. RIP Bill.

Ben Grass (1990, History)

H

How very sad!

It is somehow unbelievable: Still in last October I had the opportunity to talk to Bill for quite a while at the reception in honour of George Cawkwell's 95th birthday. Then I could not have imagined that it would be my last chat with Bill. He was as he always used to be: very warm, friendly, and interested in how you are and what you are doing. I will miss him very much when I come next to Univ.

Peter Harnisch (1983, History)

My wife and I read the news of Bill's passing with sadness and fond memories of Bill from my student days in Oxford, 1980-1985. I could share many anecdotes but three may suffice:

For some years we had the pleasure of living as the upstairs tenants of Lord and Lady Jean Redcliffe-Maud. John was a former Master of the College, Jean his small but strong-willed wife. Bill told us of his weekly anxiety on Sunday mornings in chapel when he had to stand at the door to greet new arrivals. He was well aware that George Cawkwell, Vice Master, loved a dimly lit (preferably candle-lit) chapel. But if Jean were in attendance, she had donated an electric light to illuminate a vase of flowers at the front of the chapel, and expected to see it in operation. The only switch was at the front of the chapel. So Bill would stand discreetly at the door; the light would be off; and if he saw (or heard) Jean approaching, he would scuttle to the front of the chapel to turn on the light before she entered. His mortification would then be complete if George appeared at the door as he was making his way back down the aisle.

Bill also recalled with great pleasure a certain car trip undertaken with the same George Cawkwell en route to an airforce dinner (I believe); Bill had been an airforce chaplain. On the way to the function, George drove sedately. He is a Kiwi by birth but now more English than the English, wearing plus fours and a deerstalker. George was driving, leaning well back in his seat and offering well-meaning advice with well-rounded vowels to the motorists around him; 'Now, come along dear, you need to indicate should you wish to change lanes', for example. The point of Bill's anecdote was that on the way back from the function, with a significant quantity of alcohol having loosened both George's tongue and his grip on English pronunciation, he drove hunched over the wheel in full reminiscing flight, declaiming in broad New Zild "An' then the buggers were comin' out of the sky from all sides...!"

Finally, we have a treasured photo of Bill dressed in drag as a member of our social VIII participating in a fairly incompetent rowing escapade on The River.

A chaplain fond of people with all the diversity of our failings, and never losing the common touch. Much loved, sadly missed.

Prof Julian Heyes (1980, Plant Sciences)

Bill extended the same care and kind counsel to the summer program from SMU, for close to thirty years. We will miss him greatly.

Michael Holahan

I did not know Bill well, but we were in touch for a brief period when I arranged a visit to Oxford for a group from my village church in Rowledge. We finished our day in Univ, in the chapel with Bill telling us about his work in the college with undergraduates, and conducting a brief act of worship, a very fitting conclusion to our day. Bill came across as a very friendly, approachable man, well suited for his role as chaplain. I subsequently met him on many occasions, but it was my first meeting which remains so warmly in my memory.

Colin Honey MBE (1950, History)

I was saddened to hear of Bill's passing – he was such a central character during my time at Univ and went out of his way to welcome all new students at the start of Michaelmas term each year. He proudly told me that he memorised the faces and names of all of Univ's freshers and could even recall where I was from. He was a little peeved though at not remembering my surname! Bill really helped to settle me into college life; just to know there was a friendly ear meant so much. My thoughts are with his family as I don't doubt he will be missed hugely.

Dr Charlotte Holley (née Pearce, 1998, Geology)

Few people can ever contribute to their college what the Rev Bill Sykes contributed to Univ. For more than 25 years straddling the 20th and 21st centuries, Bill made a contribution to the personal, social, and spiritual lives of countless Univ students and staff that remains unsurpassed. His passing throws into sharp relief what was gained by those whose lives he touched, and what we have lost through his sudden death.

Anyone who knows of Bill's sporting interests can only hope that God has already welcomed Bill to the best eternal seats for watching the game they play in Heaven. For those left behind, Bill's legacy lives on in the fond memories of decades of Univ students, the lives of countless college chapel attendees from inside and outside college, the readers of his published works, and wherever Sykes-inspired reflection groups are held in the world.

Bill had a wicked sense of self-deprecating humour and a keen gift for impersonating the voices of other college personalities. I hope that George Cawkwell will forgive me if I say that, in a George Cawkwell impersonation contest between himself and Bill, my money would be on Bill. Bill loved to share stories of his experiences with college students and staff with gentle humour and great fondness for the characters involved. Bill wouldn't mind me revealing the open secret amongst many at the time that Bill Warren, George Cawkwell, and a few Univ fellows and students featured regularly in Bill's story-telling.

As a former Junior Dean at Univ in the late 1980s, I can attest personally to what a difference Bill made to everyday college life at Univ. The relationship between any junior dean, college chaplain, and head porter is an important one in resolving many problems behind the scenes. When the college chaplain is Bill Sykes and the Head Porter is Bill Warren, anyone who comes into their orbit encounters a mix of mutual collegial banter, humour, respect, friendship, loyalty, and dedication the like of which I have never seen again. I mean no disrespect to the Masters or Fellows of the time when I say that, for the students, the most important and likely sources of daily

guidance, support, and camaraderie on all non-academic fronts at that time were 'the two Bills', together with Sandra and Ian Williamson.

In those days at Univ, anybody who was anybody attended one of Bill's reflection groups. He must have clocked up thousands of hours engaged in this important work. Reflection groups combined the best of fraternity, contemplation, and discussion in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and inquiry on a spiritual plane. The approach for each reflection group's hour with Bill was comfortingly familiar. Someone in the group would nominate a topic for spiritual reflection from Bill's collected (and later published) historical quotes. The group would read the quotes under that theme and everyone would remain silent and ponder them quietly. Discussion would then ensue. One always left more informed, enlightened, and nourished from the group interaction than one could gain alone in spiritual navel-gazing.

In our reflection group with Bill, one running joke was that Risto Pentilla - later to become a renowned policy expert and Finnish parliamentarian - always wanted to nominate 'Power' as the topic for that week's reflection. Bill would impishly look over to Risto at the outset as a cue. Bill also liked Australians and rugby players, and our reflection group over the years had its fair share of both. I can recall one reflection group whose membership comprised Brendan Mullin (then a rugby centre for Ireland), David Kirk (New Zealand Rhodes Scholar, former World Cup-winning skipper of the All Blacks, and later CEO of Fairfax Media), Alec Cameron (NSW Rhodes Scholar, former Dean of the UNSW Business School, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) at the University of Western Australia), Ian Jackman QC (NSW Rhodes Scholar, and one of Australia's leading silks), and me.

Bill was also the eye of the hurricane in providing support during one of the tragedies in Univ's history. For a long time, Bill carefully selected and accompanied Univ members and others on mountain walking trips during the summer vacation at the chalet co-owned by the college in Chamonix. For my first and only trip to the chalet, just before submitting my DPhil, Bill and I consulted closely as College Chaplain and Junior Dean on the membership of that year's chalet parties. Our chalet party was hosted by Professor Jeremy Lever. Andy Stillwell was my chalet roommate and regular squash competitor in college. When Andy fell (and later died) on one of the walks, on the same day that I left the chalet to return to Univ, it was Bill who greeted me and told me the awful news about Andy. Everyone from that chalet party and all of Andy's friends gathered back in Univ during the awful week that Andy was on life-support, and Bill's room, hospitality, and support became the centre for all of us and helped our group to cope then and later. Unfortunately, the chalet experience was never the same again for Bill, although he courageously led an expedition of Andy's friends and family back to the chalet the following year, to retrace Andy's steps and to celebrate Andy's joy and hopes in the last week of his life.

On the night before my Oxford graduation, with my mother Carlie and father Kevin staying in college, my father suffered an episode due to a brain tumour. It was 'the two Bills' who we called that night, as my father was taken to hospital. A year later, back in Australia, my ailing father and mother delightfully hosted Bill Sykes together with Bill and Sue Warren on their trip of a lifetime 'down under', introducing both Bills to numerous Australian customs such as a beer off the wood and a real steak at the famous Brekky Creek Hotel in Brisbane. It was one of the high points in my father's last years, and I want to remember Bill's contribution during my own dark night of the soul then too. No doubt there are countless Univ students with such untold stories of Bill's generosity, kindness, understanding, and unconditional love for others.

Bill's own contribution to Univ's new online celebration of his published reflection group topics, quotes, and thoughts sadly ends with his death. It would be a fitting tribute for that to take off and grow with the support of Univ and others providing reflections on Bill's published works of

collected quotes and personal reflections, creating an online global community of past and new beneficiaries of Bill's lifetime work.

Professor Bryan Horrigan

Great sadness at the news of Bill's demise. We met Bill in Singapore when I was in the same Battalion, 2/2nd K.E.O. Goorkhas, in 1959 ["We" means my wife and I, who were not married until 1962, due to the rule that one had to be 25]. Bill has been a close friend ever since and was Godfather to our firstborn, Brian. We last saw Bill at our golden wedding party, and are, needless to say, among the vast number of people who will be deeply saddened by his passing.

Jenni and Dale Hudson

I

It is with immense sadness that I learnt of the death of Bill Sykes. Bill was without doubt the kindest, most thoughtful and most caring person I met in my time at Oxford and, upon reflection, probably in my life. There was something uniquely special about him; the way he memorised every new student's face and name before their first term started, the way his eyes crinkled and twinkled when he smiled and spoke to you, his never ending patience, the way in which he made every single person he encountered feel valued and cared for, and the way in which he noticed and 'saw' the quiet, the shy, the lonely and the unhappy that others might easily have overlooked. He was truly remarkable. Although I did enjoy many aspects of it, I found my time as an undergraduate at Oxford very stressful and it was challenging on many levels. The pastoral care of Bill and some of the other key staff (such as Sandra and Ian, and Colin the porter) honestly did make all the difference in the world to a student who struggled with her self-confidence and finding her place in college, in Oxford, and in the world as a whole. Bill's reflection groups were a weekly oasis in a hectic and often stressful week and I valued them then and the memory of them now. His capacity to love, accept and respect everyone, whatever their personality or their faith (or lack of it) was incredible. To me he was the epitome of what it means to be a true Christian. This world is a far darker place without Bill in it but I know that I must be just one of many many people that was touched by the light that he brought to the world and that will continue to shine even though he has gone.

Please pass my most sincere condolences on to his family and reiterate to them just how much Bill was loved and appreciated and how huge a difference he made to me and others like me. I am so glad I still have his books to refer to and the memory of those cosy reflection groups in his study drinking hot chocolate and eating custard creams, to guide me through hard times.

Louise Isham (1996, Maths)

J

It is difficult to over-state the impact Bill Sykes had on the character and tone of Univ. He was one of the first dons to greet new students, and immediately made us feel welcome – despite his oddly minatory Dickensian name. His impish sense of humour and infectious laughter were among the

hallmarks of the college, and the genuine interest he showed for students dissolved many of the barriers that can often exist between senior and junior members. He took a great interest in the college sporting teams, and even rowed with us in the Gentlemen's VIII in 1987, but there was in fact no aspect of college life that did not fascinate him. The "reflection groups" which he conducted in his rooms, with no overtly religious aim, gave many of us a vehicle in which to think deeply about life, and in so doing to develop friendships with fellow students. What made these groups work so well was partly the quotations on particular themes which Bill had collected, but mostly Bill's kindness in simply listening to people while they explored and wrestled with fundamental issues. The Chalet was one of Bill's great loves, and an ideal environment for his blend of active and contemplative life. In short, Bill was a splendid pastoral chaplain, who always found and drew out the best in people.

Ian Jackman SC (1985)

As an American graduate student from 1979-1981, I always appreciated how Bill's broad smile and encouraging words would brighten the darker days and add even more sunshine to the rare sunny ones.

Jeff Jackson (1979, PPE)

It was with great sadness that I read today of the death of Bill Sykes. However, as always with Bill, it brought a smile to my face!

Reading his obituary I was struck again by how influential 'both Bills' were in my personal development, both at College and beyond. The quote on goodness from David Grayson fits Bill Sykes like one of his old sweaters!

My recollections of Bill Sykes were built around hockey and the mischief that both Bills created. Both thought they could play a bit and they were hugely encouraging of anyone who also wanted to play. Many happy days were spent both in College hockey and at the old Cowley plant team. The banter was hilarious and unrelenting, both Bills vying to outwit the other except when they decided it would be more fun to tease a naive undergraduate who also thought he could play a bit!

More importantly, Bill Sykes was one of the wisest men I have met. The twinkle in his eye and a few quiet words saved me from many an embarrassing moment and his source of information (usually Bill Warren) meant that his interventions were impeccably timed and invariably essential! The two Bills nicknamed me 'Catflap' because of my ability to break back into a closed college in the early hours. Without Bill Sykes guidance I am sure my nine lives would have run out as a freshman!

Bill was inspirational and a true force for good.

Chris Jowsey (1983, PPE)

K

I was deeply saddened to learn that Bill Sykes has died. Bill's kindness and wisdom were invaluable during difficult times when I was up at Univ, particularly after my father died unexpectedly during the Easter vacation in my first year. Bill prepared me for confirmation, half a lifetime ago, and many years later he officiated at my wedding in Univ chapel. So really he has been a hugely significant figure in my life, one of my favourite and dearest people. Bill's quiet, understated approach did more to kindle my faith, and I'm sure that of many other Univ students, than any number of more strident evangelists could have achieved. I am so glad to have known him.

Prof Stephen Keevil (1983, Physics)

Very sad to hear of Bill's death. He played a major role, with his quiet wisdom, in fostering Christian spirituality and the future pattern our lives during my time at UCL in the early 70's. This will have been true for many of us at both UCL and 'Univ'. We owe Bill a great deal.

Michael Kneen

We were deeply saddened to hear of Bill Sykes' untimely passing. Bill was a very dear friend, having married my wife and I and spent countless New Years with us in Murren.

Bart Kohnhorst

We are old friends of Bill Sykes and would like to pay tribute to our friendship.

"We have found Bill to be a person of outstanding qualities of human understanding and compassion. Always prepared to look at our frailties with humour and forgiving of our less pleasant traits. He was witty and erudite and a great companion. He was the only person one could sensibly discuss religion with. Our entire family will remember him with great fondness. Our thoughts are with his relatives, whom, we know, he dearly loved."

Clara and Dolf Kohnhorst

While we are sad at the untimely loss of Bill Sykes, we write our tribute with ease.

We met Bill in Murren, Switzerland. He fit in immediately and quickly became part of our lives, providing support and counsel through tough times and happy events in the community. His Carol services were packed and legendary. We learned to our detriment that he was an avid squash player, with a strong desire to win. He gained respect and admiration for his competitiveness and even more respect and admiration for his kindness, keen humor, and thoughtfulness off the court. He had the ability to provide pearls of wisdom, which sank in only hours or days after he delivered them.

Others have mentioned that he truly had a sparkle in his eye (or a twinkle in England). This is so true, though it was accompanied by a delightful mischievousness. This sparkle shone particularly bright when he kindly imitated some of the protagonists on recounting some of his fabled stories. Bill became a regular participant in our family's New Years celebrations, high up in the beautiful Swiss Alps that he loved. While we now live in the United States, near Dallas, we could not imagine anyone other than Bill officiating our marriage in Oxford. When we were selecting hymns that twinkle and smile appeared when asked for advice on the choices. He said: "Don't worry. Choose the ones where everyone can have a jolly good sing". Sound advice from a wise man who always could find the right words.

Bill's legacy of kindness, guidance, humor and joy in life lives on with us. He touched so many of our souls and enriched them in doing so. He loved people, and people loved him back.

Bart and Jennifer Kohnhorst-Taylor

L

I can't imagine Univ without Bill's smiling face.

Christina Lamb OBE (1983, PPE)

My wife and I are deeply saddened to hear about the death of Bill Sykes, a friend and spiritual mentor ever since he arrived at Univ during my undergraduate days.

He was quite simply a lovely man. Gentle, caring, wise and a radiant expression of a very profound faith.

Bill officiated at our wedding just after I had graduated and we have kept in touch ever since. I was a particularly strong supporter of his "Reflections" groups and we worked together to try and introduce them in our home parish in Sparsholt, near Winchester.

We feel we have lost a very dear friend. While there will be rejoicing in heaven at his homecoming, there will be a deep sense of loss among his many, many friends here on earth,

Alastair Lang MBE (1976, Plant Sciences)

I don't want to say much, because so much of Bill's life and work spoke for itself and Robin Darwall-Smith's excellent obituary captures much of the detail that I could contribute.

I think I would only say that, for me, Bill was at once the heart of the college and its soul. If a College is a community, and not just a hall of residence with some teaching going on, then there has to be a sense of caring, a sense that you, whoever you may be, are valued and treasured. Bill provided that and he provided it for everyone. He seemed to know everyone and he seemed to know about everyone. I don't know if the Wizard of Oz made it into Bill's anthologies (if not, he would have been open to its inclusion, I reckon) but that statement at the end, that the measure of your heart is not how much you love but how much you are loved, is very true and I cannot think of a better way to illustrate what Bill meant to us all.

Dr Seán Lang (1979, History)

I was very sorry to hear of the death of Bill Sykes, a great person, for whom I had a great deal of respect and admiration. I was hoping to be able to have a chat with him when I was next in the UK. His books have meant a lot to me and I am sure a lot of people have grown spiritually as a result of reading his work if not meeting him in person. He will be sorely missed. Accept my deepest sympathies.

'Transform your whole being into the magic of the Godhead itself through contemplation.'
Clare of Assisi, from the chapter on Glory in Bill's book, *A Still More Excellent Way*.

Mercy Larbi

Whilst I was not a regular chapel attender, nor knew Bill Sykes well at all in my undergraduate years, his presence in the college still left a vivid mark on my time there as an undergraduate. My defining memory of him is/was his dedication to the student body in knowing each one of us by name. He always greeted me in the quad, and always seemed interested in what I was up to. Since graduating in 2001 my faith has become a more important part of my life, and I have often felt an urge to touch base with Bill, and I am deeply saddened that that chance has gone. However his dedication to us, the student body, will remain an inspiration to me in the years ahead. He really was a remarkable man, faithful and dedicated to us all, despite our undergraduate busy-ness and general distractedness by the world and the goings on of being 19, 20, 21! I will remember him very fondly.

Katy de Laszlo (née Guinness), (1998, Experimental Psychology)

It's sad to think of a world without Bill in it.

During my years at Univ, he was a source of cheer and inspiration in good times, and of solace and guidance in more challenging ones.

I'm grateful to have seen him thereafter on many occasions, during annual return visits to Oxford before and after his formal retirement. His positive outlook on life and genuine interest in others never dimmed, and Kecia and I will always be so very happy that he agreed to perform our wedding ceremony in the College chapel.

My personal debt to him is immense, but we were all so very lucky to have had him in our lives.

The Hon Mr Justice Ian Leach (1987, Law)

To the Univ Community,

This is very sad news. Bill and I shared many wonderful conversations during our time together at Univ. We spent time together during my visit this past year. He was a kind, intelligent and thoughtful spiritual leader.

Prof Ed Leahy (Sir Maurice Shock Visiting Lecturer 2002-3)

Robin Darwall-Smith presents the flavour of Bill eloquently. To us as undergrads he was simply "Bill, the Sporting Vicar" and he knew how to enjoy participation on the field, off it and in the bar afterwards, with great humour and conviviality.

My own debt to Bill was in facing Finals from Hospital, banged up with Glandular Fever. Bill was sent by George Cawkwell and friends to invigilate me and was taken aback to find that the doctors had pepped their patient with steroids to prepare me for the 3 hour marathons. Bill said he had never seen a student's eyes so wide, or his pen move so fast. He de-toxed me with his own (illicit) half-time "oranges" mid way through each exam. A bar of chocolate, shared, as ever, by Bill from his personal stash. The examiners were happy enough and my MA was awarded with an unexpectedly solid 2nd class, with thanks to Bill, his chocolate and the steroids.

Alex Letts (1978, Classics)

Bill became Chaplain when I was an undergraduate. It was immediately obvious Bill felt the pulse of the student community and that he was part of that community. Always accessible he reached out to me at a difficult time of my life and helped me immensely to adjust to College life. When I came up in 1976 I was a if not the first comprehensive school pupil to arrive at Univ. Back then College was a very different place to today and I fully admit I felt intimidated. Bill's arrival was the start of the change that makes Univ today the vibrant, open and tolerant society it is today. Perhaps the greatest tribute I paid to Bill was my 1984 marriage in the College Chapel at which Bill officiated. My reason for marrying at Univ was Bill. Ever a friend Bill became an essence of Univ and for that reason helped me become the real Univ man I am today - something I first thought impossible on my arrival. Rest in peace me friend. You made a very real difference in my life and I thank you for it.

Prof Julian Lindley-French (1976, History)

I knew Bill from Murren. He will be deeply missed there for his kindness, fun and wisdom. Quite simply, a good man.

Bernard Lunn

M

It would be impossible to summarise the enormous influence Bill Sykes had on Univ, but to give my own person input, I can say with great fondness that my three years at Univ were made immeasurably more enjoyable by the presence of the extraordinarily wonderful Reverend Sykes. Bill was truly unique and I have never met a man that made me smile so much and feel so good about life as Bill did – his laughter was infectious. The constant stream of banter/teasing between Bill and the Head Porter Douglas Millan and then Bill Warren, along with George

Cawkwell and Brian Loughman was a delight to behold and all pure artistry at its finest. He always saw the best in everyone and was a tireless supporter of all sporting codes undertaken at Univ – especially his beloved hockey – with Bill Sykes on the side-line supporting (and often refereeing – in a very unbiased manner of course!) and with Bill Warren in goal – it is hard to believe we could be beaten. I remained in regular contact with Bill since leaving Univ and enjoyed the rare times I had the chance to meet him during his brief travels to Hong Kong – but each time was once again a wonderful moment to savour. Bill made the world a better place and the world is much smaller place without him. He was indeed a true gentleman and a wonderful friend. My heartfelt commiserations to his family.

Dr Duncan J Macfarlane (1982, DPhil Physiology)

Please pass my condolences to Bill's family. I was very sad to hear of Bill's death. I greatly appreciated and benefited from his support in my days at Univ, now some 20 years ago. His input, within reflection groups and chapel services, helped me develop my faith into one which was more thought through and properly "owned" by me. I have happy memories of crumpet teas, reflection group discussions, and sermons referring to "the divine inbreathing" and "the earthy and creaturely". I recall receiving my own personal sermon one Sunday morning when attendance at the communion service was somewhat lower than normal, and I also recall the final evensong of my time in Oxford when, rather irreverently, the Chapel Choir all had game cards for a round of "Chaplain's Sermon Bingo". Bill took it in good spirit.

The College's obituary aptly refers to Bill's "goodness" and the quiet way in which cared for the college community. Something that to me illustrated the depth of Bill's concern for those to whom he was Chaplain was an unexpected 'phone call around a year ago. Bill and I had continued to exchange Christmas cards after I had left Univ. In my Christmas card to him in 2013 I had written to him of some struggles that I had had in my faith. One February evening the 'phone rang, and it was Bill, calling to offer me some support and suggestions. I was touched by his kindness and surprised by him taking the time and trouble to call me so long after my student days and when he knew so many former students. As I thought further, though, I became less surprised albeit no less touched. Care like this was simply an illustration of Bill's character.

I was pleased to be able to talk with Bill at a gaudy last September, and to find him content in retirement. It is a sadness that I will not be seeing him again on future visits to Univ, but I feel fortunate to have known him and grateful for the care he showed for me in my time at Oxford and afterwards.

Adrian McBurnie

Bill was a wonderful man. I knew his family had lived round the corner from my grandparents in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. But on arrival at Univ, I wasn't sure what the college chaplain actually did. No matter: it became very clear over time that Bill was the person who ensured, in his own understated way, that Univ had a real soul! So many students are immensely grateful for all the enriching gifts Bill simply handed out. It was a genuine privilege to have known him.

Robert McMillan (1985, PPE)

(Bill asked me to draw the cover of the first edition of *Visions of Faith*, which I gladly did!)

We are so very sorry to hear of Bill's passing. He was a truly kind and wonderful man. We will never forget first meeting him when we came up to Univ as he already knew our names and where we were both from. When we lost a friend and fellow student at the end of that year Bill was there, for as long as it took, patiently helping to pick up the pieces - and we will always remember his kindness with gratitude. We last saw Bill in 2013 at one of Chisato's concerts in London, where it was wonderful to hear that he was enjoying retired life a great deal, was as much a part of Univ life as ever, and was very happy about his recent publications. We are so glad that this is how we can remember him.

Dr Nisha Mehta (2000, History) & **Tim Kearns** (2000, PPE)

I just want to thank Robin for his beautifully expressed tribute to Bill, who I remember with great affection. The quotation is perfectly chosen.

Rachel Moody (née Pinhey, 1984, Physiology)

I was so saddened to hear of Bill's passing; please pass on my condolences to his family. I remember my first encounter with Bill was much like everyone's – on Interview Day, when we chatted about everything that made up an 18 year old me and a 750 year old college; the hour passed as if I'd been talking to an old friend.

He made me feel instantly welcome that cold December afternoon and throughout my time at Univ, I only ever saw a smile on his face. Always supportive of everyone in college, he made many days better just with a generous word or a joke.

Ben Moor (1987, Modern History)

I have just read your wonderful tribute to my uncle, Bill Sykes in the Univ website, and want you to know how moved I am by the quotation you chose to use to illustrate his character, which in my view could not be more apposite. It has touched me very much. Thank you.

I believe my brother Michael Taylor (Univ 1980 -83) may have forwarded you something I worked up to send to the Chaplaincy to UCL about Bill's death. I studied there whilst he was in post. I have copied it below:

I thought the Chaplaincy might want to hear of the death of my uncle, William G D Sykes who was Chaplain to UCL from 1969 until 1978. He lived in the chaplaincy when it was in Gower St, and then later when it moved to 13 Woburn Square. Both were very lively places and operated as student houses, as well as centres for religious activity.

He died at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, last Saturday, 17.1.15, following complications of pneumonia, which he went down with when he was in Switzerland over the Christmas period. He had looked after the English Church in Muerren at Christmas since about 1979.

He left UCL for University College Oxford where he became Chaplain. His ministry was focussed

on developing a huge network of reflection groups within both his college and the wider university. He published a number of books, which were designed to aid this type of group: *Visions of Faith*, *Visions of Love*, *Visions of Hope*; *The Eternal Vision* and lastly, *A Still More Excellent Way*. These are collections of quotations of the most amazing diversity from world philosophy, religion, and literature. I myself studied at UCL (English and Linguistics 1977-80) whilst he was chaplain, and realised he was not only a wonderful uncle but a quite extraordinary man in his working life.

For most of his life he owned no property apart from a very superior book collection, and some rather alarming kukris from his time as an officer in the Gurkhas. He travelled all over the world, marrying, baptising and sometimes burying people. He was focussed on what he did. He did not waste time, but when he gave you his time, you had it completely. He had a capacity to listen and to take peoples' thoughts seriously. He was a passionate believer in the importance of developing what a person truly believes, and helping them to hear themselves as they find out. I think he was richest man I have ever met: in love, intelligence, compassion, and humour. His life overflowed with the things he enjoyed: people to talk to, books to read; friends to celebrate with; journeys to exciting places. I feel he reached an amazing level of self-realisation through his calling, and with that, so did very many other people. I am so very proud to have known him.

He never married, but leaves his twin sister Margaret, and sisters Janet and Anne; 7 nieces and nephews, and 9 great nieces and nephews.

Susan Mosley

N

I am very sorry to hear of Bill's passing, great Univ institution that he was. I have nothing to add that isn't well documented, but feel I should add my voice to the huge number of people who I am sure will be missing his kindness, openness and thoughtfulness. I was always delighted to run into him back in Oxford, and amazed that he was still able to recollect people's names long after they'd become alumni and moved away!

Christopher Nairne

As a Fresher in October 1978 I was lucky enough to join Univ with Bill, and his influence on my 4 years there was extraordinarily important; he was responsible for a huge amount of my happiness at Oxford.

He was part of the hockey cuppers winning team I captained, and his speed and ferocity on the left wing were a revelation - quite unlike the gentle, caring and calm Bill who was such a pastoral rock for all Univ students. His delight in getting to know others and his enjoyment in their company was always evident, and Bill's enormous sense of fun, and his excellent stock of anecdotes (not a few at his own expense), made his company a treat.

He founded the chapel choir, an institution that is one of Univ's present glories, at first with St Hilda's sopranos and altos and, when we became mixed, with Univ's own high voices. As well as breathing life into services, the choir formed a society whose friendships have been the most enduring for me. On Sundays we'd have the run of his flat before and after services, and Bill's hospitality and generosity with tea, crumpets and sherry were marvellous.

His love for the mountains was deep, and I was fortunate to visit the Chalet with Bill twice, sharing with him games, walks and company. Whether he was recounting particularly spectacular climbs (I'm afraid I clung to my amateur status and kept to the non-icy routes), or, when he joined us late in 1981, giving us a blow-by-blow account of Botham beating the Aussies, he was full of the infectious enthusiasm that made him so delightful to be with.

Although he seemed to be our age (and his appearance did not wither although the rest of ours appears to have done over the decades), his understanding and wisdom were real and reliable sources of comfort and illumination to anyone who happened have a worry.

I was indeed lucky to have joined with Bill, and to have known him.

Guy Nobes (1978)

It was with deep sadness that I heard of Bill's recent death. Bill baptised me in the chapel, was present at my confirmation (took place in the same service) and then married my husband and I (also in chapel). I was very fond of him. I've attached a reflection for you to add to your collection if you so choose. It is rough and ready and incomplete – it is very difficult to sum up his influence on my thinking and understanding. He and David Bell were instrumental in making me the person I am today.

Revd Dr Anne Noble (née Thomas) (Team Vicar, Clifton Team Ministry) (1979, Geology)

Reflecting on Bill Sykes

I first met Bill when I came up to interview at Univ as one of the potential first women at the college. The topic of conversation turned to rugby and I remember the twinkle in his eye as he provoked me into a robust discussion of how Wales had come to lose to the All Blacks (we were robbed). That twinkle was something of a feature of Bill and reflected his disarming ability to draw out revealing conversation from almost anyone. Many of us were to experience that over the years to come.

I was amazed that he remembered me when I came up and even more that he commented immediately on the state of Welsh rugby. That showed something of his sense of humour but more particularly of his ability to pay attention to people. Bill was genuinely interested in us and knew our stories our joys and our sorrows. Sometimes we could see through the depths of this care to glimpse what it cost him personally to listen to us, but Bill would always find time for us no matter how he was feeling. Three years later when my degree result came through Bill was one of the first people who knew about it, he dragged me into his rooms and made me phone my father before sending me home to dry out (it was pouring with rain) – still setting me on the straight and narrow even as my time at Univ drew to its close; concerned not just for me but for the wider family.

Bill was someone in whom it was impossible to draw a line between faith and life – his belief in God informed his life and all that he did. That made him a convincing Christian and it was that which meant that I wanted to find out more about the God who was so important to him. His way of 'evangelism' reflected the roots of that word, it was good news. Bill wanted you to hear and see all that God is and then he left you free to choose and make your own decision. Bill baptised me in chapel and then married my husband and I some years later. All through both he simply presented what he knew to be true and then sat back waiting for us to make our own response. He was

delighted when that choice was for God but continued to care just as deeply for those who chose a different path. Now ordained I owe to him much of my understanding about how to be a good priest; his counsel was transformative for me as a person. His quiet dignity, his attention, his sense of humour and his love for God and life have inspired many who came through Univ. He might have been chaplain to the whole college but to Bill we were all individuals.

Bill supplied us with faith, hot chocolate, sherry, wisdom and care without asking or expecting anything in return or trying to 'convert' us yet I suspect there will more than one of us who sat on his sagging sofa who owe to him more than we can possibly say and some, possibly many, whose lives have been transformed by our encounters with him. I will miss you Bill - may you now rest in peace and rise in glory.

P

A lovely man, who will be fondly remembered by many.

Helen Pakes (née Trinder)

R

Bill used to talk about 'divine in-breathing' in our 'Reflection' groups. He lived out that belief in treating everyone as special, in spite of our obvious follies and foibles: he really was interested in our individual journeys and our daily lives and, in his own gentle, chuckling, mischievous way, helped to keep our paths and our lines of running in rugby a little straighter. He also knew how to ask that sharp, penetrating question which stopped us short and challenged our assumptions. The hobnob with tea and the Ghurka knife. There are very few men of faith who were such true pastors. I owe him much.

Martin Reader (86-91)

S

I was extremely sad to read the news that Bill has died. I have not seen him for many years but he is a huge figure in my memories of my time at Univ. I first encountered him in my first week at college, when he stood on one of the tables in Hall at an induction event and introduced himself with dramatic flourish as the namesake of Dickens' most notorious villains. As a shy fresher I was bemused and amused in equal measure.

During my four years at Univ, Bill was a constant and comforting presence. I loved his reflections groups and found them thought-provoking and spiritually nourishing, a rare opportunity to, literally, reflect on some of the most important things in life that are often taken for granted. I remember him in those groups as encouraging, kind, and playful. I also really appreciated his open and inclusive approach to the spiritual life of the college. I am not religious but he was always welcoming and willing to discuss theological questions, never lofty or superior. He was also always ready with a

generous and un-judgmental shoulder to cry on.

He had an amazing smile and a rare warmth. I am extremely grateful to have known him and spent four formative years in the safe and nurturing college environment he was instrumental in creating.

Thank you for inviting memories of Bill, it has been nice to have an opportunity to put something down. I would very much like to attend the memorial service in due course.

Emma Satyamurti (1992, Classics)

I was very sorry to hear this very sad news. I've got to know Bill from the very first day I arrived at Oxford in 1992 (?), with a barely driveable Fiat Panda being parked outside on the High Street, and no room having yet been allocated; here was a friendly face who immediately was there to help with advice and moral support and he quickly became a source one could turn to at any time day -- or night -- and with whom one could discuss really any subject which concerned us greatly at the time, from advising us how to make our case for greater representation (of postgraduates) in the upper senior common room (i.e. where the fellows would meet to discuss the business of the college)...to Stephen Hawking's work or the likelihood of a Labour government ever coming to power, in all of this (and much more) Bill was there for us, ever present to talk, to argue, to disagree and to inspire, a real "Mensch" who possessed great wisdom but who also, on occasion, encouraged us to show a certain "humility" (his word!) for the greater meaning of life. It goes without saying that when I returned from the domestic bursary onto the High Street, the proud owner of a dilapidated room with a view somewhere in Summertown, I found my first (of many) parking tickets waiting for me on the windscreen of my beloved Fiat Panda which had just about made it to England. Bill and the many conversations I and my friends had with him over the years will always stay with me. He will be greatly missed.

Prof Ulf Schmidt (DPhil 1997, FRHistS)

Memories of Bill Sykes by Caroline Shah

Bill came to stay with me in October 2009 for a couple of nights when I was living in Hong Kong and whilst he was on a tour of the Far East and Australia with Sir Ivor Crewe. It was as though I had seen Bill yesterday - we chatted at length about Univ and Oxford, about his life and mine, and we enjoyed some happy moments drinking coffee on the Peak overlooking the City and Kowloon and having Dim Sum in Hong Kong Park.

My children, who were 7 and 9 years old at the time, remember Bill fondly even now for he was sincerely interested in them and chatted with them as equals in a way that Bill could do so naturally with anybody of any age. Bill came and collected the girls from school with me one day and was more than happy to join in our day-to-day existence, laughing, smiling, and sharing stories of Univ that brought the college to life for my daughters.

Bill also offered me much comfort and solace at a time when I was feeling isolated and distant from friends and family following the recent death of my own mother in England. I will never forget the fathomless nature of Bill's support.

Most memorable of all, though, was the time that Bill spent chatting with our two lovely security guards, Mr Pallawunga and Mr Chaps, who were both ex-Gurkas, and men of great character and

resilience. Bill went down to the security office both evenings he stayed with us and chatted with both gentlemen in English and Nepali, sharing his memories of the time that he spent in Nepal with men such as these.

Since we came back from Hong Kong, I have kept in contact with Bill and we had dinner in College last year. Before Christmas, we were re-organising another Sunday night out at Univ around Bill's busy life. I shall organise it now in Bill's memory.

Caroline Shah (1980, Mod Lang)

I am very sorry to hear that Bill has died.

Bill was young and, I imagine, full of plans for the future. Selfishly, his death serves to make me look anew at the time which may be left to me.

Bill was important to this young student, at Oxford for just one year. The chapel choir created a framework for the week. We rehearsed on Wednesdays and then on Sundays, with tea in his rooms then the service and not a few parties and celebrations in addition. One might encounter Bill at any time from his morning run until Compline in the chapel and everywhere in between. When I started my first job, Bill was at pains to provide contact with other former students in the area.

Today, in one of the many rooms in his father's house, I hope that Bill and St Peter (at liberty to toast crumpets over a live electric bar with a metal fork) will discuss the merits of 'Muscular Christianity' about which, even now, there seems much eminently practical and sensible to say.

Marion Shirley (1979, Education, PGCE)

Bill was a quiet inspiration. His reflection groups were a fundamental part of developing a mature, respectful and insightful approach to life for many of us. His steady sanity and quick wit helped us to keep the challenges of youth in proportion. His hospitality was at the heart of what made Univ a true college of learners, taking time to learn from each other across the boundaries of our different academic disciplines and backgrounds. He has been taken from us far too early.

Alastair Sim (1985, English)

Bill Sykes is probably the biggest single reason why Univ has the most connected body of old members in the University. He was the glue that kept the College together through the best part of three decades. Bill was a wonderfully broad-minded Chaplain who sought always to include. His Theology was also broad and I remember him saying when he was preparing my wife and me for marriage in 1986 that when it came to the line in the marriage service, "As ye shall answer at the dreadful Day of Judgement..." he would mumble that bit because he didn't really believe it! It was his lack of dogmatism that made him accessible to people of all faiths and none and why he was the perfect University Chaplain. In the days before "pastoral care" was really invented, he was it.

Alaric Smith (PPE, 1982)

Bill was the kindest, most dedicated man I ever met, a latter-day saint if ever there was one. For so many of us he was a friend for life, the first person we looked for on any trip back to Univ. I was deeply honoured when he agreed to conduct my wedding in Univ Chapel and later baptised my son, Robin. No man has stood stoically on more frozen touchlines than Bill. His Visions of Love inspired thousands, in and beyond Univ. The college has lost part of its true heart.

Dr Nick Smith (1976, Education, English)

I feel as though I belong to a 'golden' Univ generation – but then maybe Univ is special because we all end up feeling like that from whatever time - but my years of Undergrad 1981-4 and D.Phil 1984-88 do just feel so special and privileged: as a Univ historian under the care of Leslie, Sandy and Hartmut, to chat in the lodge first to Douglas then Bill Warren, to be under the Vice-Mastership of George, to have Gwynne and Jane in the college office and then pervading it all – the chapel services, the sports fixtures, the dinners and parties – as he seemed to be there in every aspect of college life but just in the most unshowy and kindly way was, of course, Bill himself. As only the third year of women in Univ, and therefore probably rather necessary to Bill's new Chapel Choir, I can absolutely subscribe to everything that Robin has written in his official tribute; from the crumpets and chat at tea to Bill's Evensong 'sermons' that often included, with a wicked glint in his eye, a gentle joke, but then moved seamlessly on to a moving leadership with the timeless words of the Prayer Book; these are special, candlelit memories indeed. Others will say more also about Bill's amazing Reflection groups; the most simple format but most powerful yet enjoyable tool for getting to grips with the stresses and strains of student and modern life, of trying to find out something that matters about who we all really are, where we might hope to head in life and how we might best help each other to get there.

But I've so many other memories of Bill, over and above his chapel and pastoral role; here's a brief list but I could go on and on...

-Bill was the very first person I met when I came up for interview: housed in a room in staircase IX, I'd already been invited in for a welcoming chat, tea and chocolate digestive before I'd even officially arrived! Straightaway, Univ came across with a special atmosphere I might hope to become part of.

-The two Bills, Sykes and Warren, undertook to coach our fledgling ladies cricket team. We didn't do their skills much justice, I seem to remember, but there were a lot of laughs along the way in a few 'training' sessions!

-Bill kindly offered to be my Ball partner (1983) as my then boyfriend (future husband!) didn't feel it would go down well with the PPE fellows if he stayed up partying all night a few hours before Prelims so Alaric had the ticket until 11.30ish and then Bill appeared, like a wickedly humorous Fairy Godmother, to partner me at the Ball for the rest of the night. I'll never forget his daredevil performance on the Dodgems as he tried to bash Leslie's car as ferociously as possible!

-I surely can't have been the only person to have been treated to Bill's frighteningly fantastic impression of George reading the final lesson at the Carol Service: John, Chapter 1 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Cawkwell, and the Word was Cawkwell.....' I still can't listen to this lesson every Christmas without hearing both George and Bill's sonorous renditions in my head and knowing, of course that Bill's was done out of the deepest affection for that other colossus bestriding the Univ of my era.

-I remember Bill's confession that he'd been given a rather gruesome, in his view, religious painting by Lady Maud for his room, but that he actually kept it hidden under his bed and simply brought it out and installed it on the mantelpiece when Lady Maud came to tea!

-Special memories of Bill on two holidays: the Chapel Choir's first, I think, residential trip away when we went to Gloucester Cathedral for a week in the summer vac to sing the services. I remember feeling slightly sceptical in advance about how much 'fun' this week was actually going to be; in fact, of course, it turned out to be one of my most enjoyable week's ever with Bill organising rounders' matches on the choir school lawns and post service sing-songs around the piano. The same zest for sheer fun and enjoyment was repeated several years later when Alaric and I went on a wonderful reading week in Cornwall headed by Leslie, Sandy and Bill; Bill's keenness for mad, competitive beach rounders immediately reappeared!

-Bill presiding over our very special wedding service in the college chapel; how many other Univ couples are lucky enough to share these memories- there must be hordes of us by now!

-Bill's friendship extended way beyond the Univ family. When I was teaching at Oxford High School by the early '90s, we went on a summer holiday around Mont Blanc with two other couples and Bill met us for the day from the Univ chalet and showed us his favourite sights in his beloved alpine scenery. I still have the photo of the beaming Sykes, chilled pint glass in hand on an alpine terrace, on my kitchen wall to this day.

-Bill was totally inspirational when, also in the early '90s, I suggested to sceptical Oxfordshire villagers that a possible way to try and revive the life of our dying village church might be to try something called a Reflection group. Bill came out to explain the whole vision, did a trial group for the brave and slightly less sceptical, provided all the materials we might need and away we went. For quite a few years, the two groups were a wonderfully enjoyable hour where lots of different people really got to know each other and carried on their 'reflections' in the village pub after the official reflection was over! Bill's unthreatening yet powerful, uncomplicated yet profound vision, conveyed by that broad beaming grin and friendly chuckle, struck a chord once again.

Alaric and I have been lucky enough to continue living around Oxford since our college days and so have been privileged to continue to see Bill throughout all these years since the early 1980s. My last two meetings with him perhaps summed up some of the shining qualities I've most come to see and value in Bill since that very first cup of tea at interview. I spent three hours with him over multiple cups of coffee in Quod this November as he quietly listened and sympathetically gave advice over various stressful teenage twists and turns now for my own children. It just seemed so natural to turn to Bill for advice and a chuckle in the middle of stress.

As it has turned out the very last time I saw Bill was at this year's Old Members' Carol service. We went as a close former Magdalen chorister friend of my son is now singing in the Univ Chapel Choir and reading English at Univ. It was very moving, almost unbearably so now in retrospect, to sit once again in the chapel pews, to hear the present generation in the choir and to have the unexpected pleasure of hearing Bill read one of the lessons in the service. Afterwards we shared our mince pies with Bill in Hall, with him as eager as ever to get to know the new generation of 18 year olds, listen to their enjoyment of Univ and to share, of course, some wicked stories of his own to light up their eyes! Somehow the wheel feels as though it has come full circle.

Bill read a lesson from the mighty prophet Isaiah in that last service; perhaps an unlikely prophet himself, certainly none of his biblical brethren can have had that wicked grin and sense of humour, but I think certainly Bill was, and still is, the best type of prophet for scores of us who have travelled through the Univ quads since 1978. Univ will never seem the same again.

Dr Sarah Smith (Hodlin - History, 1981-4, 1984-8)

Bill, you were a great man, and you made my time at Univ special.

Rob Stein (1983, Economics)

Reverend Bill Sykes is the person who married us at Univ chapel when we were there, and christened us at the chapel later. He has been the person whom both Yoko, my wife, and I will never forget. Most sincere condolences from my wife and I.

Shinusuke J Sugiyama, Deputy Foreign Minister of Japan (1978, PPE)

Bill was my first contact with the Anglican Church and nearly my first with Oxford and England. He radiated welcome. Somehow his presence communicated itself although we probably didn't exchange five words in three years.

When I returned to Univ 17 years later to graduate, Bill took the trouble to remember me. Now, remembering his quiet strength and kindness, I wonder if he has shown me what it is to be virtuous.

Christopher Suits

T

I was extremely saddened to learn of Bill's death. I remember him very fondly from my days at Univ in the 1980s and used to see him regularly in the boathouse at Eights Week in the years thereafter. I know what a huge part Bill played in the life of the College and he gave comfort to so many of us as we struggled with our various worries. I had a great admiration for Bill (despite the fact that I am a confirmed atheist!). He never tried to force his faith on anyone, but rather he gave them very human and caring advice, and his natural and very genuine warmth. I appreciated that very much.

Bill, you will be sorely missed!

Dr Stuart Taylor (1980, Chemistry, Medicine)

W

I was sorry to learn of Bill's passing. Although it was a long time ago, I still recall how kind and thoughtful he was to me when, as a confused post-graduate student, I arrived at Univ from the very different environment of Imperial College London. Brief though our encounters were, I remember his welcoming smile and quietly interested conversations with fondness, and greatly appreciated the

efforts he went to to put me (and, I'm sure, thousands of other new arrivals) at ease. My condolences to his family.

Dr Jeremy Walton (1980, Chemistry)

For over a third of my life Bill was my closest friend. I saw him daily except for holidays. We shared many 'laughs', a lot of sad moments and a few tragedies. Together we visited the sick, spurred on the rugby team and watched episodes of "Fawlty Towers" when 'the going got tough. He was there for me and we were there for him. He baptised my grandchildren and took an interest in my family. I shall miss him and think of him constantly.

Bill Warren (Head Porter, 1980-2002)

I was very sad to hear of Bill's death - what a wonderful man who made a difference to so many of us over the years. I have scanned in some photos of the chalet trip 1990 which feature Bill, in case they are of interest to you.

Helen Weavers (1986, Biochemistry)

I and my husband Peter knew Bill as chaplain to the other Univ – University College, London. We each lived in the Anglican Chaplaincy in Woburn Square, where Bill was based. At that time the square had a warden, Harry, who spent the day in 'Harry's hut'. Needless to say, Bill had a fantastic bantering relationship with Harry, which gave entertainment to all of us. He introduced us to Bill the college porter, some years later, as Harry's natural successor.

As UCL was a Godless College, Bill's status was more equivocal than at Univ Oxford. Nevertheless, he was a powerful presence and influence for good throughout the College. He led the Anglican Society and started his meditation meetings within the society, basing them at first on a book by Aldous Huxley, 'The Choice is always ours' while at the same time beginning his own collection, which he shared with us as he worked on it.

He had so much joy, loving kindness and sheer fun, giving us nicknames (mine was Tresor, Peter was Ace Man), which he still used in this year's Christmas card.

We have kept closely in touch with Bill over all the years, visiting him in Oxford and having him to stay here. We felt, like so many of his other ex-students, that he was a truly close friend and we will miss him deeply.

Gilly Wilford (University College, London 1974 – 77)

One of my first memories of arriving at Univ in 1979 – as the College was still trying to work out exactly how to welcome its first women – was Bill Sykes calling my name across the quad before we'd been introduced. Later I learned that Bill took time to memorize Freshers' names and faces from our application forms. One felt immediately at home with him.

Bill's hearty hospitality, his inspirational teaching, his honesty in preaching, his sheer *joie-de-vivre*, all made us love and value him. I spent a lot of quiet time in a reflection group regarding the Alpine peaks that stretched around his walls. I suppose my own vocation to priesthood began in Univ's Chapel thanks to Bill, and many years later it was Bill who acted as my sponsor. His chuckle, his brilliant (but never cruel) comic impersonations of fellows and staff, his ongoing support for so many of us long after graduation – how wonderful! My best memory: Bill 'mulling' wine by boiling claret in his kettle after a particularly gruelling hockey match.

Rest in peace, Bill, and rise in glory.

Revd Canon Dr Janet Williams (1979, Classics, Theology)

It's hard to imagine Bill without his mischievous smile and twinkle in his eye. He presided at our wedding, at my mother's funeral, and at our daughters' christenings, and yet I can't remember him ever looking or being solemn. He was kind, and welcoming to everyone, and was, I feel, one of the reasons that Univ. was such a warm and caring college when I was there. I last met him on a bus, just before Christmas, and he was as interested and as twinkling as ever. I will miss him.

Kate Wilson/Bailey

I first met Bill Sykes in 1995, before I came up to Oxford. I was auditioning – successfully, as it turned out – to become a choral scholar at Univ (I am still not sure whether I was the first, though there were no choral scholars in the years above me). I then spent four years singing in the chapel choir, with my Friday nights being a curious combination of chapel choir rehearsal and Jewish Society. Bill was always welcoming to his puzzlingly Jewish choral scholar. His reflection groups were a wonderful part of my first year in Oxford, introducing me to new people and allowing a space for quiet reflection and chocolate Hobnobs in the midst of a busy term. For a Christian, his sermons were remarkably full of almost pagan sentiments (divine inbreathings and the beauty of nature), as well as jokes aimed at the Head Porter. His pre-chapel teas (hot, buttered crumpets) and post-chapel port-drinking sessions were an essential part of my life in college.

Above all, Bill was receptive and kind, and a genuinely good person. He really did learn the names of all the undergraduates, even those who never came near the chapel, and some lessons from his sermons have stayed with me through my life. I wish that I had seen him more often in recent years. Though it is a cliché, he really will be much missed.

Benjamin Wolf, www.benjaminwolf.co.uk; www.boybershop.co.uk

Bill was a very dear colleague who was full of gentle reflection and humour – whether at the top of the Mt Blanc among Univ undergraduates, or in the quadrangles of the college after a long Governing Body meeting – he was always there for anyone. I loved his slightly subversive streak which would lead him and our former Head Porter Bill Warren to giggle madly when the two scamps played yet another trick on me!

Prof Ngaire Woods, Senior Research Fellow at Univ and Dean of Blavatnik School of Government

