

TRIBUTE TO PAST RIBI PRESIDENT & RI DIRECTOR NOEL FRYER

5TH AUGUST 2022

ST LUKE'S CHURCH, HODNET, SHROPSHIRE

By Past District 1210 Governor Ron Lucas

Good morning Sir Algernon, Lady Jane, and everyone.

Noel Fryer was something of an enigma in Rotary circles in this Rotary District – a District given the number 1210 and comprising most of the counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, and West Midlands, and stretching from Leek in the north east to Ludlow and Dudley in the south, and most of the time comprising 57 Rotary Clubs with a male and female membership of over a thousand.

It was into this Rotary District in 1975 that Noel became a Rotarian and began his service of great distinction to the association of Rotary Clubs in over 200 countries and geographic regions comprising a membership in excess of 1.2 million. He joined Kidsgrove Rotary club at the age of 31. He quickly made his mark because four years later he took on the role of District Treasurer, in 1979-82, and only seven years later, District Governor in 1986-87, having risen to this high office in just eleven years – and still he was only 42. But Noel had greater aspirations as he wished to serve Rotary nationally, so serving on various committees in Rotary in Great Britain & Ireland (RIBI) he was nominated and appointed as National President, in 1995-96. And it was in this Rotary Year, 1995-96, that I had much to do with Noel and his wife Anne, as I became the District Governor of his Rotary District – and as a contrast I had taken 23 years to reach this office, just over twice the time it had taken Noel.

But Noel was laying down a marker for even higher office than National President in these Islands as he aspired to international service, so he let his name go forward to become a Director of Rotary International (RI) based at Rotary's Headquarters in Evanston, Chicago, USA. And so, duly elected, he served as Director in 1999-2001; and in his second year as a Director, he served as Rotary International's Honorary Treasurer overseeing the financial accounts of our world-wide association and Rotary's only charity, The Rotary Foundation. Both accounts involved scrutiny of millions of US dollars, as you can imagine.

As an aside I recall speaking with an American Rotary International Board member at a reception in Anaheim, California, at an International Assembly and I explained that Noel Fryer was from my District. The American looked at me calmly and said, "Noel Fryer is a real heavyweight on the RI Board – when Noel speaks everyone listens".

But at local level Noel continued to serve the various Rotary clubs he subsequently joined as his domestic and business circumstances changed. From Kidsgrove, to Newcastle Blackfriars, then to Burslem. and when he and Anne moved to Hodnet, to Market Drayton, and latterly Newport Lite. Sadly, two of these clubs closed down during Noel's time as a member, Blackfriars, where he was last the President, and Market Drayton, but the latter has risen from the ashes again in May, thankfully. I know many members of

these clubs are represented here today as is our current District Governor, Steve Antill from Bloxwich Phoenix Rotary Club. Welcome to you all. So much for Noel's role of honour, so to speak.

I recall many hilarious and memorable moments serving with Noel. The International Evening at the annual International Assembly in California is always one of the highlights of the week of training of the over 500 incoming District Governors from all over the world. Ours was in the February of 1995. Each country puts on a show lasting about ten minutes complete with colourful traditional dress. So it was that Noel and Anne hit on the idea of enacting and singing the old traditional song "Old McDonald had a Farm E-I-E-I-O"..... we the Brits had rehearsed it a few times and Noel, as Old McDonald, was to dress up in a Scottish kilt with all the gear, Anne was the dairy maid with James's little lamb under her arms, the rest of Incoming District Governors from Britain and their wives were dressed as cows, sheep, chickens, pigs, etc.. I was thumping out the accompaniment on the piano dressed as a farmer, and my wife Cynthia was dressed as Ronald McDonald. It was partially an acknowledgment of the American fast-food chain McDonalds now operating across the world. The idea was to finish on a climax and throw the toy lamb into the front row of the audience of over a thousand, onto the lap of Herb Brown, the Rotary International President-Elect. However, horror of horrors, a member of the Rotary staff informed Noel that Herb Brown was the founder and CEO of a pan-America fast food chain called Chequers. We realised our rendition would go down like a lead balloon with Herb Brown, so what to do? We had no time to change our routine, so we went ahead and at the climax at the end, with one accord, we all shouted "but Chequers is coming" which went down well with everybody especially Herb Brown when the toy lamb fell into his lap. We brought the house down.

In January 2001 my wife Cynthia and I joined up in South Africa with Oddmund and Bjorg, Norwegian Rotary friends we first met at the International Assembly six years earlier. We were attending the Rotary Peace Conference in Cape Town and then holidaying together. Noel was Convenor of the Conference appointed by the then Rotary International President Frank Devlyn, a Mexican. As chair of the organising committee Noel would fly out to Cape Town on a Friday for meetings over the weekend, returning overnight on Sunday to be in his office on Monday morning. There was little acknowledgment of our presence by Noel until passing us with the President and officials in tow, Noel looked at Cynthia and made a tongue in cheek disparaging remark about her weight, much to the chagrin of the Norwegians who overheard his remark. They were clearly not au fait with British humour. Quick as a flash Cynthia got her own back as she replied, "this is a case of the kettle calling the frying pan black", as Noel at that time was a little overweight himself. It was all taken in good part, and it illustrated Noel's unconventional sense of humour.

Noel's prowess at chairing difficult meetings was well known at all levels of Rotary service. His most challenging meeting was at the RIBI Blackpool Conference during his Presidency of RIBI. A Rotary club in North Somerset proposed to start a new club in Yatton but one of the club members had other ideas and put every obstacle in the way

including taking RIBI to Court claiming the proposal was unconstitutional. It wasn't but, very un-Rotary-like, the member concerned brought a proposal to the business session of the Blackpool Conference which Noel as President chaired. Noel's grasp of all the issues was exemplary and the proposal was defeated. Noel received quiet acclaim for his efforts on the day.

Now you might think listening to the Financial Statement of Rotary International and its Foundation would not be everyone's favourite past time, but at the Rotary Convention in San Antonio in 2001, when Noel was Honorary Treasurer, this is what he had to do. And he delivered it with such aplomb that all those present were talking about it afterwards and one of my own club members, knowing I was to speak about Noel's abilities today, even reminded me of it just a few days ago – some 21 years later. Such was Noel's skill.

I should like to conclude with a tribute to Noel from Gordon McNally of the Queensferry Rotary Club, Edinburgh, who will become President of Rotary International on 1 July next year, only the sixth President from these islands since Rotary was founded in 1905 and the second Scotsman. Knowing I was to give this tribute to Noel, Gordon writes

“As I prepare to serve as President of Rotary International, I am conscious that, to quote Sir Isaac Newton, I am “standing on the shoulders of giants” - those Rotary giants who have shaped my personal Rotary journey.

One such giant was Noel Fryer.

I will forever be grateful to him for his wise counsel as I prepared to serve as District Governor in 1997-98 and for his encouragement to go on to serve both Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland as well as Rotary International.

He will be missed by many around the Rotary world but they, like me give thanks for his service.

Heather and I hold Anne, James and the wider family in our thoughts and prayers”.

To Gordon's tribute to Noel, I may add thoughts and sympathy I have received from Brazil, USA, Finland, Tasmania, and a Past RIBI President from London.

I am not wearing a black tie today, rather I am wearing my Rotary Theme tie from 1995-96, Noel's RIBI President's Year and my District Governor's year. The theme reads.....

“Act with Integrity. Serve with Love. Work for Peace”.

Whatever else he was Noel acted with complete integrity in all he did.

He Served Rotary with Love, as he served others with Love; and Gordon McNally adds to his tribute – despite his often bluff exterior, I always found him to be caring and very supportive.

And he Worked for Peace, as I witnessed at the Peace Conference he so ably put together and chaired in South Africa many years ago. Noel Fryer in many ways in Rotary, and in life, was a one-off, but we honour his memory on this day.

May he rest in Peace and Rise in Glory.

RWGL/Word/C

5 August 2022