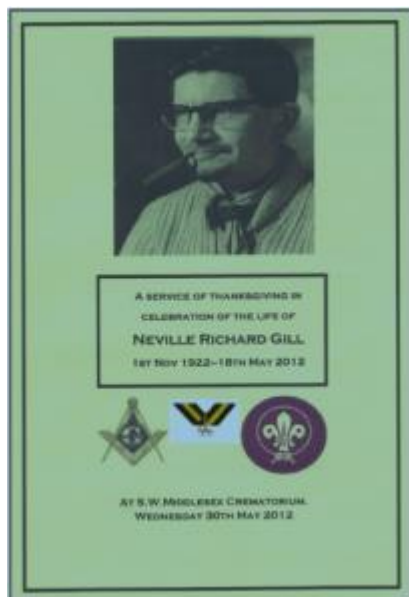


NEVILLE RICHARD (DICK) GILL...

Tribute by Tony Sheppardson

Neville to his family, Dick to his boyhood friends and scouting colleagues and Richard to his brethren in Freemasonry and to the friends he made in later life. Neville Richard Gill was, by any name an unforgettable character. Born on the 1st November, All Saints Day, in 1922 to a family of small shopkeepers, his parents had the post office and store on Hillside Stonebridge Richard was educated at Bridge Road Junior school and Willesden County Grammar School, which he attended before the Second World War. The thirties were a very political time and Richard was very involved in producing some kind of revolutionary left wing newssheet, which upset the headmaster and who only allowed it to continue under Peter's supervision as a prefect, much to Richards everlasting disgust.



His first job was in the city office of Spicers, the paper company, but the prospect of war soon caught up with him and he volunteered and joined the R.A.F. as a trainee pilot, firstly stationed in the U.K. and then in Rhodesia to complete his flight training. Being Richard he made the most of his

time in Africa, although he often expressed to me how much the racial discrimination upset him. His flying was not so successful, he was grounded, and managed, in the height of the war, to get discharged from the Air Force, came home to the U.K. as a civilian and after a few months joined the navy as a seaman, eventually became a Writer and was on the Admirals staff in Naples located in the old royal palace at Caserta. It is a salutary thought that Richard was being trained as a bomber pilot and such was the attrition of bombers in the war, that had he got his wings the chances were that he would not have survived. As an opera buff he was in his element in Naples and was also involved in putting on shows for the occupying forces in the Theatre in the palace. Once again he fell on his feet, as one of the senior officers was one of his old bosses at Spicers'. After demob. he returned to Spicers, than moved on to Palm Toffee, a move much appreciated, in the days of rationing, by the various scouts he was associated with, for he always had a plentiful supply of toffees with him. In the early fifties he joined Richmond Borough Council as an administrative officer where he stayed until his retirement.

His scouting career started as a boy in the 29th Willesden, based on St. Mary's, the medieval parish church and on leaving the navy again got involved with the troop and his pre war friends, in turn becoming Scoutmaster and than Senior Scout Master. He also spent many years as a leader with the 7th Willesden. But his most substantial contribution to the movement was firstly in the Scout District of Willesden, where he was in turn District Scoutmaster, Senior Scouts, Assistant District Commissioner for Scouts and then for Leader Training. From 1958 to 1993 he held important posts in Greater London Middlesex West, in Leader training, as a member of the County Executive, variously as Assistant County Commissioner for Scouts, for Venture Scouts and as County Archivist. He was also, for many years, fully involved in running the service team at the Chalfont Heights scout camp site.

His many services to Scouting were recognised by the movement with the award of the Medal of Merit in 1963, the Silver Acorn in 1976 and its highest award, the Silver Wolf, in 1985. He became a very well known and with his inevitable pipe, a well recognised and friendly figure throughout Scouting, in Middlesex and it is remarkable how many of his old scouts remember him with great fondness.

In 1971 the Treaty of Uxbridge Lodge was formed at Uxbridge with Richard's old school colleague Dr Peter Rogers as its first Master who was also, at one time very involved in Scouting in Middlesex, proposed Richard into Freemasonry. Richard took to Freemasonry like a duck to water and always regretted that he did not join earlier. He became Master of the Lodge in 1979 and served many years as Treasurer, a task he took on with great trepidation having no experience in money matters, other than spending it, which he did with great enthusiasm, but he did the job well, although he never fully appreciated the necessity for double entry. He became a member of other degrees in Freemasonry, namely the Royal Arch, the Mark, the Cryptic and Royal Ark Mariner, in which he was to become the Master of one of the most important Lodges in the Province and his contribution was recognised in all of them. Richard was never going to be an expert Masonic ritualist although it was not for want of effort, but he was an enthusiastic Freemason, always ready to offer his assistance wherever he felt it was required and was diligent in looking after the welfare of members who were ill or had fallen on hard times.

Freemasonry and Scouting are often linked together as similar organisations, which they are not. It is, however, true to say that anyone who enjoyed scouting and was successful in it is was most likely to become a good member of a Masonic Lodge, both requiring commitment to a common cause, a concern for the welfare of others and a willingness to be fully involved and to undertake whatever task necessary for the success of the organisation. Someone

as companionable as Richard, with his concern for others, his commitment and his sense of duty and responsibility was bound to be a popular and successful member of both.

An enthusiastic opera fan Richard firstly had an extensive collection of 78s and long play records which were eventually replaced with C.D's and his own recordings from television broadcasts. Many of you will, doubtless, recollect his scathing comments on modern popular music, although he did not confine his scorn to that, sport on Television getting in the way of his favourite programmes was another pet hate. Television played an important role in his life, especially in his later years, and he always had to have the latest T.V. set and associated "boxes." Anything he was interested in he recorded, although it is doubtful if he ever watched many of them.

Richard was very proud to be able to trace his ancestry back some 500 years. Richard Gill was very much a patriot and a strong believer in our Patron Saint, St George and greatly enjoyed regularly taking part in the Annual Boy Scout St Georges Day parade at Windsor Castle. Indeed when he thought that one of our Provincial Grand Masters was not regarding the Saint with due respect he sent him a book on the subject, to the amusement of both. It would not be a true picture of the man if we did not include his love of Chihuahua dogs, although as small as they were, there was no doubt as to who was the boss! A man who cherished his memories he could always tell a good story from his many experiences, whether from his schooldays, the war, scouting or any other field in which he was involved and he would be the first to admit that they did not diminish in the telling.

Richard Gill was in many ways a product of so much that underpins our modern society. He came from a well established small shopkeeper family, he went to his local grammar school, saw service in the war in the armed forces, membership of two establishment organisations, namely

Scouting and Freemasonry to which he added his own quirky and sometimes mischievous sense of humour. He could be irascible and at times impossible, but he was a well rounded, caring and highly intelligent man of great charm whose companionship and friendship was sought and enjoyed by so many people in whatever sphere he moved. The large numbers here today to bid him farewell are proof of that. We were all the better for knowing him and we will all miss him. Our condolences especially go to his brother Geoffrey and his brother-in-law, Ben, both of whom are here today.

Do not be too sad at the passing of Richard, he died full of years after a short and increasingly painful illness. Remember the man you knew with joy in your hearts and with happy memories of all that you shared with him. Cherish his memory with a smile and with happiness. He would not have wished anything different.

Tribute by Paul Spencer

How do you remember Dick? Was it the pipe, was it the small dog in his coat pocket, was it the "discussions", was it the computer generated banners on training courses or was it the traditional scouter with traditional values. Many will remember him as in this drawing by Chris Raper.



Dick started his scouting in Willesden where the family lived and held his first appointment as Scoutmaster with 29th Willesden in 1949. Dick soon became involved with Senior Scouts and held leader appointments in both 29th and 7th and was for a time Group Scout Leader of 7th Willesden. He

was also a District Scouter and an Assistant District Commissioner in Willesden. In 1958 he joined the Training team and was a member for some thirty years, as well as serving as Assistant County Commissioner (Scouts) and Assistant County Commissioner (Venture Scouts). He had fond memories of both Elstree Training Ground – Waxwell Camp site, now known as Northern Heights and the move to and development of Chalfont Heights, now known as Paccar.

Following the award of the Medal of Merit and the Silver Acorn the Chief Scout made the award of the Silver Wolf in 1985.

Dick's great love was opera and it was interesting to hear him tell stories of how he got tickets to opera houses in many parts of Europe. His other hobby was as a freemason where he held office both locally and regionally.

He passed away in his sleep having suffered terrible pain over the last few weeks, so although a sad time it is also a happy release for Dick, our thoughts must be with his only surviving relative, Geoffrey his brother. The funeral service of Remembrance was held on 30th May 2012 and conducted by Capt Don Woodhouse CA, the Scout County chaplain and attended by many scouting and Masonic friends.

Donations in his memory may be made to the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institute (cheques payable to the "RMBI") can be sent to the Funeral Director, A.B. Walker & Son Limited, Blythe House, 105 London Road, Wokingham, Berkshire. RG40 1YB. The RMBI operates the Lord Harris Nursing Home where he spent his last few weeks.