

*A Celebration of the life of*

## **Brian Freeman OBE**

11 July 1939 – 9 July 2024

1 August 2024, Kingston Crematorium

*Celebrant: Stephanie Forster*



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Brian was born in Rotterdam and spent his early years in Holland. His mother Mary Anne was English, from South Shields, and his father Frederick was Dutch. Brian was their second born, joining his brother Ronnie at their home in the Hague before Cyril completed the family. When Brian was 14 the family came to England where he, his father and two brothers, were naturalised as British subjects in 1959 and in the following year they changed their surname from Lagendyk to Freeman, which was the name of Brian's English grandmother.

On arriving in England, the family lived in Raynes Park and Brian went to school locally where he learnt to speak English, having always spoken Dutch at home. Thankfully, Brian's studious nature meant that he soon picked up this new language and he did well at school before starting out in the world of work. His first job was with a shipping company where he stayed for a few years before being called up for National Service, one of the last group to be summoned. After a short spell in Aldershot, he was posted to Aden on the Arabian peninsula where he became a football referee and learnt to drive - in a jeep! Brian enjoyed his time there and used to recall swimming in the Gulf waters with his fellow soldiers while netting protected them from the nearby sharks!

After he returned home Brian went into the Civil Service; initially with the GPO before joining the Ministry of Public Building and Works where he met his wife, Lesley. They married in April 1966 and a year later moved to Teesside for their work with the Board of Trade. They bought a bungalow on the edge of the North York Moors and enjoyed exploring the North East area, especially taking long walks across the Moors with its views over Teesside. In his spare time Brian terraced the garden and built a brick garage with his impressive DIY skills.

Five years later they returned south and Brian joined the Department of Energy. He rose to a senior management level and was involved in the regulation of the gas and nuclear industries. Towards the end of his service, he was the UK negotiator for the international nuclear safety convention covering land-based nuclear power plants which involved travelling to Brussels and Vienna and in 1994 he was awarded an OBE for this work, although he remained humble about his important contributions.

It was when Brian started spending time abroad for work that Lesley suggested they get some cats to keep her company. So they choose two British shorthairs who Brian loved, although once they had died he soon realised they had been the cause of his 'asthma' for all those years.

Early in their marriage, Brian and Lesley spent holidays travelling the Greek islands, thoroughly enjoying the food and the swimming. Later, in the 1980s they began walking and wildlife holidays with friends, David and Barbara, firstly in Derbyshire and later in France, driving over to Burgandy and other central areas where Brian loved the sunshine and the wine. Other travels involved Scotland, Wales and other parts of the UK, and then as age took its toll and walking distances became more difficult, they began taking river cruises.

Brian was always active and his interests included cars especially his Saabs, wildlife - with trips to the London Wetland Centre in Barnes complete with binoculars and a picnic lunch, theatre and museum outings in London, and fine dining at his favourite French restaurant. But his main activity was in DIY. He spent a lot of time renovating their home in Surrey where they moved in 1976, redoing the plumbing and electrics as well as the guttering and restoring the wood panelling himself.

Brian also reconstructed the garden creating windings paths, wide planting beds, and lovely seating areas and in recent years he enjoyed sitting in the summer house, reading the paper and watching the birds fill up from the feeders he put out. Another of his interests was photography and Brian was a keen member of Kingston Camera Club. He installed a darkroom at home where he processed his own films and produced prints for competition. Landscapes were his favourite subject to photograph and he was also a willing helper when they were setting up exhibitions and displays.

On retirement, Brian and Lesley became volunteers at the Rose Theatre in Kingston. As well as ushering shows, he took over much of the day-to-day maintenance of the building with his practical know-how and Brian was instrumental in keeping it up and running on many occasions. He played a major part in the Hinchley Wood residents' fight against McDonalds who were trying to taking over the redundant pub in the 1990s. As well as carrying out research into the traffic implications, he wrote the main part of the report for the Department of Transport Inspector. The Inspector found in favour of the residents and McDonalds acknowledged that they had had little chance of winning.

Wherever he went Brian was a chatty soul, continually interested in people, he liked keeping abreast of current affairs and world news, and of an evening a good comedy show always brought a smile to his face.

Throughout his life Brian was close to his brother Ronnie, paying him regular visits at home in Raynes Park and sadly Ronnie died many years ago, and Brian's other brother Cyril has also since passed away. Brian enjoyed being an uncle to Steven and Julia, and her children Jacob, Emily, Maddie and Theo. Most of all Brian liked sharing his days with Lesley, keen to do everything together, and he looked after her wonderfully throughout their lives. They shared 58 very happy years of marriage with Lesley taking care of Brian in his final years, and Brian is so sadly missed by Lesley, his family and all those who had the privilege to spend time in his company.