

Canon Stephen Timbrell

17 March 1950 - 12 May

12th May 2008

2008

Following the death of Canon Stephen Timbrell, headteacher of Blue Coat Church of England School & Music College on 12 May 2008, the school community and the Diocese of Coventry are deprived of one of their most talented, visionary and highly respected colleagues who lived out his Christian vocation through education in an inspirational manner.

Rev'd. Tim Pullen writes: "In the five years I have been Chair of Governors at Blue Coat I have counted it a real privilege to work with Stephen. His unflagging commitment to see that each individual student was presented with the best possible opportunities to learn, develop new skills and achieve success has helped give thousands of students the greatest possible platform to build on for the future. Staff have benefited from his wisdom, guidance and encouragement. The resources and facilities at Blue Coat have been enhanced in very significant ways. Underpinning all that Stephen has achieved has been the working out of his faith in Jesus Christ, no-one could have been left in any doubt about that! Stephen's legacy to Blue Coat is immense. We will all miss him greatly."

Diocesan Church School headteacher colleagues have reflected on the warm welcome he offered to them at meetings where his clear and direct Christian conviction immediately shone out. They went on to say: 'He made it clear that Christian commitment and care are at the heart of the school, and that the school is going forward only, and wholly, because Jesus is at its centre.'

Born in Ross on Wye, Stephen lived in Herefordshire for most of his life. He attended Ross on Wye Grammar School followed by the Universities of Exeter and Keele where he successfully completed first degree and post-graduate qualifications. Before moving to Coventry Stephen taught at Cirencester Deer Park school for ten years before joining the Gloucestershire Technical Education Project which aimed at developing courses for pupils aged 11-14 using the expertise of business, enterprise and industry to support learning. This work was based at Beaufort School in Gloucester but Stephen was responsible for curriculum development across five other schools as well as Hartpury College of Agriculture and Gloscat, which is now incorporated into the University of Gloucestershire. Maybe it was here that Stephen honed his skills of incisive perception, the imagination to have at least five new ideas before the start of school each day and another five before lunchtime and the prayerful focus to develop a strategy to see a project through to its successful completion using innovative thought and dogged determination.

Stephen's potential was clearly recognised when he was appointed Senior Teacher at Beaufort School before becoming Deputy headteacher at Lakers School in the Forest of Dean. His tremendous capacity for hard work coupled with his desire to further his own learning led him to combine these roles with study for an International MBA through the University of Humberside and Lincoln in the UK and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, USA.

The appointment to the headship at Blue Coat came in 1998. The Rt. Rev'd. Mark Bryant, Bishop of Jarrow

who, when in the Diocese of Coventry was, for many years, Chair of Governors at Blue Coat writes: "When we interviewed Stephen he was clear that he wanted to be the head of a Christian school. At Blue Coat he has created a school where it is normal and natural to pray and to speak about what it means to be a Christian; a school where nobody is in any doubt about the centrality of Christian faith. This has made a very attractive school to many including those of non-Christian faiths who rejoice in finding a school which so plainly takes faith seriously. This has gone alongside raising standards and seeking to ensure the best provision for every individual young person whatever their skills, abilities and needs."

In November 2007 Stephen was installed as Honorary Lay Canon of Coventry Cathedral in acknowledgement of his immense contribution to the education and lives of thousands of young people in his care. The Rt. Rev'd. Colin Bennetts, recently retired Bishop of Coventry writes: "I am convinced that none of those who have recently given faith schools a hard time can have known Stephen Timbrell. Among his many gifts was the rare ability to be clear and uncompromising about his Christian faith, whilst at the same time leading an excellent school renowned for its warm inclusivity and serious engagement with the community. When, last year, I invited Stephen to become an Honorary Lay Canon of Coventry Cathedral, I was wanting to honour his outstanding contribution to the educational life of Coventry City and the diocese. He will now receive an infinitely higher honour from the One who alone can say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

At the time, displaying his predictable humility and shyness, Stephen reflected that he saw the award as recognition of the impact of education and particularly Christian education on the work of the church.

Married and devoted to Sallie-Anne after the death of his first wife Jennie in 1988, Stephen was surrounded by a loving family of seven children. He relished the opportunity to spend time with them and especially enjoyed holidays in their house in France. His hobbies included natural history, geology and boats.

As a Christian Stephen has been a long time Deacon and now Trustee of Gorsley Baptist Church in Herefordshire; a church which built and developed sheltered housing and health services for the community. Stephen worshipped at Holy Trinity Church, Coventry, Foundation Church for Blue Coat School.

On Stephen's inspirational qualities as a head teacher, the Rt. Rev'd. John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick has said 'his professionalism, character and, not least, his luminous Christian faith have ensured that the school has become one of the finest Church of England Schools in the country.'

Those of us who had the privilege of working with such a valued friend and colleague, who was so clearly a man of faith and vision will treasure the memories of Stephen. He was a gentleman totally committed to trying to discover what it was that God wanted so that he could strive to work to the very best of his ability to achieve for young people, the absolute best opportunities. Nothing less would do!

An electronic book of condolence may be accessed as follows <http://www.covdioc.org.uk/stephentimbrell.htm>
In addition, a traditional book of condolence has been opened in Coventry Cathedral.

Linda Wainscot – Diocesan Director of Education