



John Vincent Bowen 1912 - 2006

John Bowen was born on the 18th October 1912 and died on the 15th September this year. John, the eldest son, survived a twin at birth, and two brothers and sisters. His mother, Louie, a staunch Catholic was related to Saint Oliver Plunkett. In October 1975, Mary and John attended his canonisation in Rome.

During his 93 years John achieved so much. He received his early education from the Sisters of Mercy at Alton Castle in Staffordshire and progressed from there to the Jesuits at Stoneyhurst. On leaving school John trained as a quantity surveyor and joined the family building firm, John Bowen & Sons, in Birmingham, remaining with the company until he joined the army in 1940.

John met Mary before the war and they were married in April 1937. Their first child Peter was born the following year and his sister Jane arrived in 1941 only five days before John sailed from Liverpool on the journey which was to terminate in Singapore.

John's active service came to an unwelcome end when he was captured by the Japanese on the fall of Singapore in 1942. It was ten very long and anxious months after the fall of Singapore before Mary and the children received news that John was alive and a prisoner of war.

During his three years in captivity, the first few months of captivity were spent in the notorious Changi prisoner of war camp. This was followed by six months at Keppel Harbour working as a stevedore loading and unloading ships. He was then transferred to Bampong where he worked on the infamous "Death Railway". In 1944, and in common with most officers, John was taken by ship to Japan where he was set to work in the Mitsubishi shipyards. In 1945 he spent his last few months of imprisonment in Mukden (now known as SHENYANG) in China from where he was released by the Russians in August of that year. After the war, John did not complain but gave evidence for one of his captors who would otherwise have been shot. John arrived back in England just before Christmas 1945.

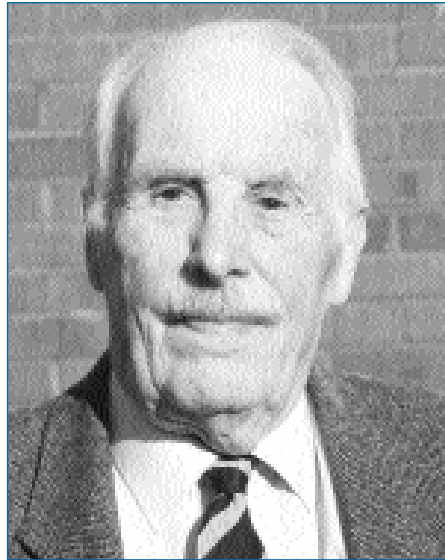
A third child Timothy was born to the family in 1946 but sadly Timothy died of leukaemia some 20 years ago. This was a second tragedy for John and Mary since they lost a grandson in similar circumstances.

On his return to civilian life, John joined the Turriff Construction Co and remained with them until his retirement in 1977.

John's leisure time had been actively

engaged in rugby football and tennis, being at one time or another Secretary of Kings Norton Rugby Club, Secretary of Milverton Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club and Treasurer of Leamington Lawn Tennis Club.

Catenian life began in 1935 when as the President's Marshall he was a founder member of North Warwickshire Circle (111). He became President in 1938 giving up the post just before he joined the armed forces. He returned to North Warwicks on demobilisation, transferring to Leamington Spa (160) in November 1951, again as a founder member.



The office of President, once again, came his way in 1954, to be followed by that of Provincial Councillor from 1955 until 1963. In 1963, he became the Provincial President and then succeeded George Harris as Province 6's Grand Director in 1965. The journey upwards continued and John eventually reached the Association's highest office when he was installed as Grand President at the Annual Conference in Bournemouth in 1973. During his time on Grand Council John also became a founder member of Stratford upon Avon (236) being for sometime a dual member of that Circle and Leamington Spa.

Whilst Grand President John inaugurated Coulsdon (272) and Ellesmere Port (273) Circles.

By rule the Past Grand Presidents serve on Grand Council for a period of six years but John felt that, like Presidents of Circles and Provincial Councils, Grand Presidents should serve for only three years. When he made it known that he did not wish to serve for six years he was informed that Past Grand Presidents could not resign from

Grand Council. However, John being the man he is, decided that after three years as Past Grand President he would attend no more of Grand Council's meetings, nor did he!

During 1974, John and Mary undertook what was probably the longest overseas visit, in terms of distance travelled, of all our Grand Presidents. The Association had accepted an invitation from the Knights of the Southern Cross (New Zealand) to attend their Golden Jubilee celebrations. It was decided at the same time that this trip should also incorporate a visit to the overseas Circles in Australia and Africa.

On the outward flight, John and Mary stopped over for a day in Singapore where they took the opportunity to make a brief tour which included a visit to the impressive War Cemetery at Kranji. Their journey then continued to Australia and a visit to Sydney Circle (263) which was at that time the only Australian Circle. On then to New Zealand for five days to share in the Knights' celebrations.

The journey back to the United Kingdom took in Sydney once more and then on to Adelaide and Perth. It was in Perth that John met a nucleus of Catenians who were to form the second Australian Circle, City of Perth (279), some three years later.

From Perth, John and Mary travelled to Johannesburg, with a short stay at Mauritius on the way. In Africa they visited South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, meeting the brothers and their families from five Circles, Bulawayo, Salisbury, Lusaka, Copperbelt, and Pretoria. Whilst in Lusaka John had the pleasure of meeting with his own brother Patrick. The final flight home was via Nairobi and Rome.

In 1969, when he was still Grand Director, John Bowen promised Catenian help for the Youth and Light Pilgrimage. The Association raised over £10,000 and was responsible for helping more than half of the mentally handicapped children who made the journey to Lourdes. Again in 1974, when he was Grand President, John invited members of the Association to consider providing a second Jumbulance to help in the work of the Across Trust. Although Laurie Tanner, the Grand Secretary at that time, received a lot of the praise for this, there is no doubt that without the support of the Grand President, the £25,000 needed to build and equip the Jumbulance would never have been raised.

During 1983, the brothers of North Warwickshire and others raised a large