

**Obituary: Reverend Brian William Kirk (20 January 1931 – 29 January 2019)**

*Chris Jessop*

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**OBITUARY: REVEREND BRIAN WILLIAM KIRK  
(20 JANUARY 1931 – 29 JANUARY 2019)**

As a radar technician in the Royal Navy, Brian journeyed to the Arctic Circle, the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean and much enjoyed the physical life that the service required. He played squash, tennis, cricket, boxed, and played rugby for Northampton in his youth.

He was born and grew up in Northampton, where he attended Northampton Grammar School, later gaining a BD degree at King's College, London, through his studies for the ministry. He became something of a scholar minister as he set down for posterity the vital story of dissent in Taunton when he wrote *The Taunton Dissenting Academy*, published by the Society in 2005. He had already researched and written *A History of Taunton United Reformed Church*, published in 1999, and the history of the chapel in Bishops Hull. He was referred to in scholarly bibliographies and recognised for his six contributions to the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Prior to moving to Somerset as minister of Taunton URC, Brian served in two churches: in Hendon, London, where he was also the Chaplain of Colindale T.B. Hospital and of Hendon Police College, and in Hertfordshire.

Once established in Somerset, he became the Free Church Chaplain of Musgrove Park Hospital, Chaplain of Tone Vale Hospital, and Chaplain of the Taunton Royal Naval Association.

Education was something else Brian gave time to. He was governor at Selworthy Special School, and chaired the board of governors, as well as being a governor of Somerset College of Arts and Technology. He represented the Free Churches on Somerset Education Committee as well as serving on the Libraries, Museums and Records committee of Somerset County Council.

The London Churches Council on Gambling was another group that Brian also supported.

He had many interests: rugby and cricket, butterflies and moths, lichens and all aspects of natural history. He collected hellebores and cyclamens, and grew lilies from seed. In retirement he founded the Stogumber History Society, which he organised and led for many years, enjoying and becoming knowledgeable about local history.

Brian became chairman of the Natural History Committee in 1980, a position he held until 1989, and



*Brian Kirk (far left) in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen at the Museum of Somerset in 1987, with Glyn Court (adjacent) and Stephen Minnitt (far right)*

again in 1992-5. He was Vice Chairman of Council from 1983 until 1984 and Chairman 1984-88 and having fulfilled the allotted years stood down from the Council. In 1991 he was elected as a trustee which then became known as a Custodian Trustee in 2001 due to some changes in the Charities Act of 1993, a position held until his death. Brian was also active and supportive in plans to restore and preserve the Castle, home of the Society.

At the 2012 AGM, the membership voted to award Brian honorary life membership in appreciation of his commitment and work carried out for the Society.

As his health gradually deteriorated, Brian was less of a visual presence at meetings but he never lost sight of the importance of keeping up to date with what was happening in the life of the Society. Early in 2018, Brian's signature was required to a document. By then he had not been driving for some time. I offered to visit

and get the required signature and take the opportunity to introduce myself as the proposed next Chairman of the Society. I had met Brian on a few occasions in the office, but didn't think he would remember. I was wrong. He remembered he had told me he had made a mistake in a book we were discussing that he had written. The following half an hour could have been very stressful, Brian asked so many questions about what was happening within the society, but he was such a gentle, patient man it was a pleasure.

I was not active within the Society in Brian's more involved years, but I am sure I would have enjoyed working with him. His commitment to public services was driven by his faith to make the world a better and more loving place to live in.

Chris Jessop