

# Harold Burnett, MBE

Harold Burnett was born in Balsall Heath in 1904, but lived for fifty-five years in Moseley, where he died in 1990.

Harold's father was a violinist and although Harold never played the violin, he loved music and used to enjoy the concerts in Cannon Hill Park given by the City of Birmingham Brass Band and the Police Band. Later he was associated with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, its conductors, committees and welfare. The Birmingham School of Music benefited from the work of Harold Burnett, especially when it made its Centenary Appeal.

Tindal Street was the school to which Harold went. His last school report referred to the most intelligent pupil the Headmaster had ever taught - hard-working and conscientious. Although unable to benefit from further education himself, Harold Burnett became a life-long educator through his work in the Boys Brigade and his association with Selly Oak Colleges, of which he became a trustee in 1946.

When he was six a certain Miss Edwards, from the local corner shop, introduced Harold to the Sunday School at Moseley Road Methodist Church, thus beginning a lifetime of service at that Church, where, at one time or another, he held every office open to a layman. But Harold's church work was not limited to his own church, he was secretary of the Birmingham Christian Social Council for twelve years from 1936 and afterwards a member of the Birmingham Council of Christian Churches.

His first job was with the Public Works Department - appropriate, considering that his faith led him to serve others in all sorts of ways - but later, Harry Payne invited Harold to join his family firm of shoe-menders and he eventually became one of its directors. In 1935 Harold Burnett married Annie Kathleen, Harry Payne's daughter, who joined in his benevolent work.



*Harold Burnett, M.B.E.  
Captain, 10th Birmingham Company, The Boys'  
Brigade*

But Payne's was not only a great Midlands shoe-mending business, it had charitable trusts, it was concerned with employee development, good working conditions, and Harold Burnett was able to put into action his belief in fellowship and partnership in work. In 1939 he became secretary of the Harry Payne Trust. For many years Harold was a member of the Birmingham Civic Society, and in 1970 he became a member of its council. It was for his public service that Harold Burnett was awarded the M.B.E.

Health and healing were also Harold Burnett's concern. He was associated with St. Mary's Hospice in Selly Oak, and was for some years secretary of the House Committee of the Women's and Maternity Hospital. Harold Burnett was a founder member, and later the chairman, of the Hamlin Churchill Childbirth Injuries Fund, a trust to help poor women in Ethiopia who had childbirth injuries.

But the Boys' Brigade was Harold's greatest concern. He joined in 1924 and in forty years' service

missed only six parades, always arriving early. In 1941 Harold Burnett became Captain of the 10th Company. He was an efficient organizer who planned everything in advance, leaving nothing to chance, and was insistent on things being done in the correct way. The boys benefited from this, not only in the regular Bible classes and Sunday parades, but at camps and in visits to London, when Harold would conduct tours round sites at considerable speed. He had a wonderful memory for people and, looking at old photographs of the Company, Harold could recount the names of all the boys. Old boys of the Company received birthday cards (reduced to every tenth birthday after a time, because of the numbers) and his Christmas card list was considerable. In 1985 the 10th Company made him Honorary Captain.

Harold Burnett was much respected well beyond his own Boys' Brigade Company. From 1965 to 1979 he was President of the Birmingham Battalion, and afterwards its Honorary President. In 1982 he became Honorary Vice-President of the Boys' Brigade.

*Roy Thomas*

Sources of information:

Mrs Annie Burnett;

Members of the 10th Company, The Boys' Brigade.