

Westminster Abbey



A Service of Thanksgiving
to celebrate the Life and Work of
RONNIE CORBETT CBE

4th December 1930 – 31st March 2016

Wednesday 7th June 2017
Noon



*'But I digress...' Ronnie, in inimitable chair pose,
ready for another rambling monologue*

Ronnie Corbett was one of the UK's best loved entertainers, with a career spanning more than six decades and embracing television, film, theatre, and cabaret. Most famously, *The Two Ronnies*, his longstanding partnership with Ronnie Barker, made him a household name and even a national treasure. 'I do find the "national treasure" thing very touching,' he once told one interviewer, 'actually, it brings a tear to my eye when people call me that.'

Born in Edinburgh to a Scottish baker and his English wife, Ronnie was educated locally but shunned further education after a handful of performances in amateur theatrical shows at his church youth club convinced him he wanted to be an actor.

He served in the Royal Air Force and was, at only five feet tall in his stocking feet, the shortest commissioned officer in the British Forces.

After moving to London, he made his professional stage appearance as Ronald Corbett in *Take it Easy* in 1956. Initially sensitive about his height, he soon realised that he could use it to huge comic potential.

It would indeed be used to very memorable effect ten or so years later in the celebrated 'Class' sketch. David Frost, who had seen Ronnie in Danny La Rue's cabaret club Winston's, asked him to join John Cleese and Ronnie Barker on *The Frost Report* (1965, BBC), thereby creating not just a classic comic moment but also accidentally facilitating one of the greatest comic partnerships of British Television.

The duo got their own show in 1971. It then ran for 16 years, and up to 22 million British viewers regularly watched *The Two Ronnies* on BBC Television most Saturday nights. Sublimely funny moments – such as the 'four candles' sketch, with its surreal riff of absurd misunderstandings (evoked obliquely here today – for those more observant members of the congregation!), became part of comedy history, as did the Ronnies' catchphrases.

The shows would traditionally end with Ronnie's weekly rambling monologue ('But I digress...'), as he sat in his trademark armchair, placed 'centre stage' today in Ronnie's memory.

When the partnership of *The Two Ronnies* ended in 1987, both men went on to successful solo careers. Ronnie played middle-aged librarian Timothy Lumsden in the BBC sitcom *Sorry!* which ran for seven seasons.

There were also late-career comedy turns in the BBC Radio 4 sitcom *When the Dog Dies* (2010) and on BBC Television in *Little Britain Abroad* and Ricky Gervais's sitcom *Extras* (2006), in which Ronnie gamely subverted his national treasure status. Ronnie was always keen to support new comedy talent, and forged many friendships with the newer generations of comedians.

However, Ronnie's talents were not confined to the small screen. He had early theatre success in *The Boys from Syracuse* with Bob Monkhouse, and even a role in Lionel Bart's *Twang!!*, the bedevilled follow-up to *Oliver!* His film appearances included *Rockets Galore* (1957), *Casino Royale* alongside David Niven (1967), and the cinema version of the farce *No Sex Please, We're British* (1973). And he never lost his love of cabaret – often pairing up with his wife, Anne.

Ronnie's other abiding passion was golf, and he appeared in countless charity tournaments including the Harry Secombe Golf Classic. During his presidency of the Lord's Taverners (1982 and 1987), he boosted funds for the charity by playing in charity tournaments and profile raising.

Ronnie married Anne Hart in 1965, and in 2015 they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. They had two daughters, Sophie and Emma, as well as a son, Andrew, who died of a heart defect at six weeks old. Ronnie once said 'I've had a very happy life and although I have had tragedy, I've never suffered from any darkness.'

Ronnie was appointed a Commander of the British Empire in 2012 for services to entertainment and charity.

Robert Seatter, Head of BBC History

The whole of the church is served by a hearing loop. Users should turn their hearing aid to the setting marked T.

Members of the congregation are kindly requested to refrain from using private cameras, video, or sound recording equipment. Please ensure that mobile phones and other electronic devices are switched off.

The service is conducted by The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster.

The service is sung by the Westminster Abbey Special Service Choir, directed by James O'Donnell, Organist and Master of the Choristers.

The organ is played by Daniel Cook, Sub-Organist.

Before the service, the BBC Concert Orchestra, directed by Richard Balcombe, plays:

Change Partners and Dance with Me *Irving Berlin (1888–1989)*

I Like the Likes of You *Vernon Duke (1903–69)*

Music Maestro, Please! *Allie Wrubel (1905–73)*

I'll See You Again *Noël Coward (1899–1973)*

Look at that Face *Leslie Bricusse (b 1931)*
Anthony Newley (1931–99)

I Found a Million Dollar Baby *Harry Warren (1893–1981)*

Somewhere over the Rainbow *Harold Arlen (1905–86)*

all pieces arranged by Richard Balcombe (b 1955)

Matthew Jorysz, Assistant Organist, plays:

Fantaisie No 1 in E flat *Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)*

Andante Tranquillo *and* Allegretto *Percy Whitlock (1903–46)*
from Five Short Pieces

The Lord Mayor of Westminster is received by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. Presentations are made, and he is conducted to his seat. All stand, and then sit.

Sarah, Duchess of York, representing His Royal Highness The Duke of York, is received by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. Presentations are made.

Dame Penelope Keith DBE DL, representing Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, is received by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. Presentations are made.

All stand.

The Dean conducts the representatives of the Royal Family to their places in Quire.

ORDER OF SERVICE

All remain standing. The choir sings

THE INTROIT

SING joyfully unto God our strength : sing loud unto the God of Jacob.
Take the song, and bring forth the timbrel : the pleasant harp, and the viol.

Blow the trumpet in the new moon : even in the time appointed, and at our feast-day.

For this is a statute for Israel : and a law of the God of Jacob.

William Byrd (c 1540–1623)

Psalm 81: 1–4

All sing

THE HYMN



PRAISE, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same for ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
widely as his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him;
dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace.

Praise, my soul 436 NEH
John Goss (1800–80)

Henry Lyte (1793–1847)
after Psalm 103

All remain standing. The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, gives

THE BIDDING

WE are here to celebrate the life of Ronnie Corbett, to give thanks to God for his goodness and generosity, for his love of his family and friends and for the comic genius that gave immeasurable joy to countless people.

During its long history Westminster Abbey has witnessed many occasions of celebration and thanksgiving and many of sadness and loss. Here we bring before God joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies. Our emotions are often mingled: we remember what we have lost as we give thanks for what we have loved.

As we commend Ronnie to the loving care of almighty God and as we pray for Anne, Sophie and Emma, his family and friends, let us recall with joy his gifts: the brilliant comic timing, the twinkle in the eye, the richness of his voice.

So, it's good day from me and it's good day from him ...

All sit for

A TRIBUTE

by

Jimmy Tarbuck OBE

Sir Michael Parkinson CBE reads from the Great Lectern

THE FIRST READING

SURELY God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 12: 2–end

The choir sings

THE PSALM

WHEN the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion : then were we like unto them that dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter : and our tongue with joy.

Then said they among the heathen : the Lord hath done great things for them.

Yea, the Lord hath done great things for us already : whereof we rejoice.

Adrian Batten (c 1591–1637)

Psalm 126: 1–4

THE SECOND READING

IF I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13

All stand to sing

THE HYMN



THE Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnishèd
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me;
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Crimond 459 NEH
Jessie Seymour Irvine (1836–87)

Psalm 23 in Scottish Psalter 1650

All sit for

THE ADDRESS

by

James Moir CBE LVO KSG

Fflur Wyn, soprano, sings

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH

I KNOW that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
from Messiah

Job 19: 25–26, 1 Corinthians 15: 20

All kneel or remain seated. The Reverend Christopher Stoltz, Minor Canon and Precentor, leads

THE PRAYERS

For Ronnie's life and for all that endeared him to his family, friends, and colleagues, let us give thanks and pray.

Emma Corbett, daughter, says:

PRAISING God for our father, we give thanks for his understanding and compassion, for lending us his supportive voice when we were at a loss for words; for his warmth and the constant and unfailing love he showed us.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sophie Corbett Grahame, daughter, says:

RECALLING the many blessings God has shown to us through our father, we give thanks for his strength of personality; for his kindness and patience especially in difficult times, and for opening our eyes to the beauty of life.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Tom Corbett, grandson, says:

REMEMBERING the example of our grandfather, we give thanks for the invaluable lessons he taught us in self-possession and graciousness; for his moral conviction tempered with gentleness of reproach, and for the optimism he inspired in us all.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Simon Parker Bowles, friend, says:

REJOICING with Ronnie in those things that thrilled him most: oysters and champagne, aspiring comedians, golf, dogs, and slow horses; and especially his love of Anne, his family and close friends, to whom he gave of himself so generously.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The Reverend David Stanton, Canon in Residence, says:

MOST merciful God, who in your loving kindness gave us so much joy through your servant departed: we thank you for him and for our memories of him. We praise you for your goodness and mercy that followed him all the days of his life, and for his faithfulness in the tasks to which you called him. We bless you that for him the tribulations of this world are over and death is past; and we pray that you will bring us with him to the joy of your perfect kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Precentor concludes:

Let us unite our prayers in the words which Jesus Christ has given us:

OUR Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All sit. Ruthie Henshall sings

I'll be Seeing You

*Sammy Fain (1902–89)
Irving Kahal (1903–42)
arranged by Richard Balcombe*

All remain seated for

A TRIBUTE

by

Rob Brydon MBE

All stand to sing

THE HYMN



MINE eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
he hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:
his truth is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
he is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgement seat:
O be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant my feet!
Our God is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Our God is marching on.

I have seen him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps:
they have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damp;
I have read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
his day is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
His day is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
as he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free,
while God is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
While God is marching on.

*Battle-Hymn of the Republic 242 H&P
traditional American melody*

Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910)

The Dean pronounces

THE BLESSING

GO forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour everyone; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

All remain standing as the choir and clergy, together with the representatives of the Royal Family, depart.

Music after the service:

Final *from* Symphonie I Op 14

Louis Vierne (1870–1937)

Put on a Happy Face

*Charles Strouse (b 1928)
arranged by Richard Balcombe*

Members of the Congregation are requested to remain in their seats until invited to move by the Stewards.

The bells of the Abbey Church are rung.

*A retiring collection will be taken
in aid of the Motor Neurone Disease Association.*



*Ronnie, accepting another costume challenge,
in one of the popular historical dramas of The Two Ronnies*

Printed by
Barnard & Westwood Ltd
23 Pakenham Street, London WC1X 0LB
By Appointment to HM The Queen, Printers and Bookbinders
& HRH The Prince of Wales, Printers
Printers to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster
