

# Brian Roy Pitkin

12th November 1945 to 31st August 2021

*P*resident, Chairman, Webmaster and Newsletter Editor (now In Focus); a huge force in BSoUP for so many years, Brian succumbed this year to a cruel illness. Below are some extracts from the eulogy read at his funeral, courtesy of Linda, his wife.



*“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”*

This quote by Albert Einstein could have been written with Brian in mind, as it speaks directly to Brian’s deep and abiding love of the natural world. Nature teaches us so many valuable lessons. We see how organisms thrive in ideal conditions and how they adapt to challenges. We see the cycle of birth, life and death. Brian, as a man of science, knew all about this through his studies, and knew, as we

all do, that life is finite. In logical and clinical terms, we, too, understand this. It was Brian’s love of nature that took him to exploring the wonders that lay beneath the waves.

Brian went to Archbishop Tenison School in Lambeth. He also joined the scouts where he attained the Queen’s Scout Award.

From early on, Brian had a strong interest in Natural history, pursuing butterflies with other young lads, and his love of the natural world was evident throughout his life.

That love led to a 41 year career with the Natural History Museum. He started off as a Scientific Assistant in the Entomology Department. Brian’s catalogue of work began with thrips or thunder flies – tiny, flower-living insects - then on to springtails and later, flies. He published many very useful scientific research papers

before becoming Systems and Data Manager.

One of Brian's finest qualities was that he was always doing work to make others' work easier. During the course of his work at the Museum, Brian gained his doctorate. No doubt it was a proud moment when he became Dr. Brian Pitkin. After retirement, Brian continued for some years as a Scientific Associate, working from home on a web-based project he had started earlier on British leaf mining insects. The website is a much valued resource, as are the others he worked on. Indeed, Brian had a number of insect species named after him, including one that rejoices in the name *Bhattithrips pitkini*.

Brian was a collector. One of his passions in the past was mud larking on the Thames and over the years, he found many treasures such as knives and a sword that date back several hundred years. This pastime had to be done with relative speed as before you knew it, the tide would be coming back in and the treasure hunt would have to be put off until it had gone out again.

During the 1960's and 70's, the Natural History Museum had a great social scene, with many young people working there. In 1967, Brian made the acquaintance of a lovely young woman, Miss Linda Macdonell

who also worked at the Natural History Museum in the Entomology Department. Brian and Linda formed a friendship and by 1969 had started dating. Brian's silly sense of humour often showed itself. Once, when Linda was signing her name he thought she'd signed Mad Nell instead of Macdonell and felt that was very appropriate!

On the 25th of July 1970, Brian and Linda were married at St Andrews Church in Cheam.

After the honeymoon, Brian and Linda settled into their first home in Thornton Heath, moving house 11 years later to their forever home in South Croydon.

A work trip to East Africa started Brian's fascination with the undersea world and when he returned home, he joined the Thornton Heath branch of The British Sub-Aqua Club, learning how to dive. A few years later, he convinced Linda to join.

Brian soon became the Diving Officer, and virtually ran the small club, doing most of the training of new members as well as organising dives. They had the most wonderful adventures, and opportunities to get nose to nose with marine life, anything from a shrimp to a whale shark.

Underwater photography quickly became a passion.

Brian was a very accomplished photographer, but his greatest achievements were what he gave of himself. He and Linda joined BSoUP in 1980, and he soon became very actively involved with the organisation, with a huge input over the years in different roles: Newsletter Editor (now In Focus), Chairman, Webmaster, President; Brian even set up the Facebook group. He was also well-known at the British Dive Shows, troubleshooting and comparing the speakers' presentations. He wrote many reports on BSoUP's photography competitions for Diver and other magazines.

As Chairman of BSoUP, for many years, Brian was the welcoming, helpful, friendly face of the Society.

In diving and in underwater photography, all along, he was befriending and encouraging others, particularly newcomers; and he is remembered with love and appreciation for that.

When health problems made it difficult to dive and photograph as he would have liked, Brian still had another venture, the Surrey Botanical Society. Having always loved country walks and exploring and discovering all of the flora, the next logical step seemed to be Wildflower recording.

From 2008 Brian went on field meetings in the Surrey countryside, with Linda and Society members. His

database skills came in handy and he produced useful data maps.

For 52 years, Brian and Linda shared their lives and interests. Was it always sunshine and roses? Of course it wasn't, but they overcame troubles and shared so much love, laughter and fun.

### **Some of the tributes at the funeral:**

*Thank you Brian for making me feel welcome when I first joined BSoUP and for all your help and support afterwards. I will treasure the memories of all the trips we did together.*

*I will never forget Brian mending my flooded camera on his holiday! He was so friendly and helpful.*

*An amazing man and a very skilful photographer.*

*Always so kind and supportive to us fellow photographers. He'll be sadly missed.*

*Such a warm soul and always so kind to us at BSoUP.*

*Brian was such a gentleman, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.*

Brian's health declined rapidly in this past year with the onset of Lewy Body Dementia. This cruellest of thieves stole Brian's memories and his



mobility. Through it all, Linda was a constant, always there for Brian. With the help of the care team from Premier Care, Linda was able to keep Brian at home for as long as possible.

Dr. Brian Pitkin, a much-loved husband, friend and colleague; a well-respected entomologist and underwater photographer left us on the 31st of August.

*You can shed tears that he is gone  
Or you can smile because he has lived  
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back  
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left  
Your heart can be empty because you can't see him  
Or you can be full of the love that you share*

## **A few words on Brian Pitkin**

by Alex Mustard

Following the very sad news of Brian's death, I am sure many people in the society will be sharing their thoughts and tales of fun times with Brian. And many are much better placed than me to review his many achievements and contributions to the world of underwater photography.

I wanted to simply say that I believe that Brian Pitkin was THE most important member in the history of BSoUP. He was the heartbeat that kept the blood pumping and BSoUP vital for decades. There was rarely an underwater photography event that Brian wasn't involved in making happen and he created the incredible resource of the original BSoUP website, starting it at a time when there was almost no information about underwater pho-

tography on the entire internet. And much, much more.

Personally, I am most grateful for his friendly and welcoming attitude and for many, many members he was the icebreaker that drew us into the society. When first I dipped my toes into our community it was, of course, Brian who spotted the fresh-face and said hello, found some kind words to say about my slides, and got me involved. Thank you, Brian!

And I will always be very proud that I had the chance to share underwater adventures with both Brian and Linda around the world. I am sure you are up there now, greasing o-rings and organising a heaven's first Splash-In! BSoUP will always miss you.