

NRG

Tributes to
Robert Gullifer

Headmaster of
New College School, Oxford

2008-2019



NEW COLLEGE SCHOOL, OXFORD
PRE-PREP & PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Foreword Miles Young	4
1. “A combination of Thomas Arnold and Mr Chips” Curtis Price	6
2. “Engaging my mind and my heart in friendship” Clarisa Rucabado Butler	10
3. “Turn disaster into triumph” Philip Swan	16
4. “An instinctive understanding of young people” Vivienne Durham	19
5. “Great enthusiasm and a convincing accent” Stephen Richards	21
6. “Everything would work out in the end” Jacqueline Whitaker	24
7. “Quiet, calm deliberation disentangles every knot” Paul Dean	27
8. “Commitment, culture, courtesy and charm” Paul Baker	30
9. “A master in diplomacy” James Horton	32
10. “An unassuming man with a huge aura” Giles Wordsworth	40
11. “Striving for excellence without belittling the striver” Sandie Capel	45
12. “Vision, passion, judgement and resilience” Oliver Visintin	48
13. “Immensely kind and extremely considered” Rosemary Cox	50

14. “Tireless hours of hard work” Tom Barry	53
15. “A gentle hand and a listening ear” Caroline Showell-Rogers	55
16. “Know thyself” William Cross	59
17. “Encouraging and appreciative” Emma Krebs	63
18. “Do what Mr Gullifer does” Sammy Jarvis	65
19. “The aesthete’s eye” Richard Poyser	69
20. “An ideal role model to both pupils and staff” Rachel Faulkner	72
21. “A single project ... educational excellence” Edward Higginbottom	78
22. “Exactly the person one would want as a Headmaster” William Whyte	85
23. “Fairness and consideration” Brett Morrison	91
24. “Integrity and virtue” Jane West	93
25. “Hearts and hands and voices” Robert Quinney	95
26. “Kind, caring, patient, thoughtful, committed, indulgent” Matt Jenkinson	100

Foreword

Miles Young

If one were to design from scratch someone perfectly fitted to be Headmaster, I believe that one would end up very close to creating Robert Gullifer. He looks like a Headmaster. He sounds like a Headmaster. He departs himself like a Headmaster. But not just a common or garden Headmaster, an exceptional one: a Headmaster who (in my experience) fiercely yet politely (and they never seemed incompatible) defended his patch; a Headmaster who showed interest in each individual pupil but also had a clear and broad sense of strategy; a Headmaster who is wired to a strongly held belief in the value of tradition but who also is relentlessly innovative.

All these talents deployed in New College School helped the School grow to a position of enviable excellence in Oxford. I do not think that would come if all his other attributes were not also joined by a love of music, both scholarly and passionate; and an academic bent which has found its outlet in his (first of many) poetry anthologies, *How Poems Work*, the contemporary successor to the *Dragon Book of Verse*, authored jointly with the Headmaster-designate. He perfectly fitted the ethos of our Foundation. But lest anyone thinks that I am describing some kind of clinical paragon, Robert brought to all of these attributes a sense of mischievous wit and sometimes vivid mimicry, whenever the moment was ripe.

Boys and parents will miss Robert as much as I will. I saw a valued, reliable colleague; they saw a mentor, academic, guide and friend. No wonder New College School prospered exceptionally under his leadership. We will not be losing him altogether, but this is the point when I can thank him for all he has done for us, and wish Louise and himself the very best for the future, and the happiest of retirements.

1

“A combination of Thomas Arnold and Mr Chips”

Curtis Price

Robert Gullifer is a brilliant Headmaster, as anyone walking into New College School for the first time can tell: it is warm, welcoming and happy, with a palpable sense of purpose. Yet, for various reasons, the school that Robert inherited had falling enrolment, a middling academic reputation, dissent in the ranks and a large deficit. Now, I should explain that NCS is a fully owned subsidiary of New College Oxford and is, as such, overseen by the Warden and Fellows. Before Robert’s arrival, there were one or two dons who wondered why a college of the University should be in the business of running a boys’ preparatory school. Was it not an expensive anachronism?

His mind perhaps concentrated by these grumbles, Robert set about to turn the school around. Within a couple of years there was full enrolment, a balanced budget and then even surpluses, a series of excellent staff appointments, happy boys in all years and a reputation for excellence and well-being which grew from year to year thereafter. Dissenters and stirrers on Governing Body were silenced and Robert’s stock soared within and without college.

He relied on a simple formula for success. Though he may appear gentle and mild-mannered, Robert has a keen, dare I say ruthless, competitive streak. He knew that even in Oxford there's only a relatively small pool of families who can afford to educate their children privately, leaving aside for the moment the question of choir schools. It was feast or famine. If Christ Church and Magdalen were up, NCS was down.

With an uncanny feel for a boy's potential, unfailing kindness, courtesy and honesty when dealing with often desperate parents, a knack for appointing brilliant teachers, a nose for business and a love of teaching Philosophy, Religious Studies and English, Robert transformed the school partly by filling it but also by making it the best in Oxford. It all looked deceptively easy. But this success was underpinned by a deep understanding of how children learn and develop, an awareness of the dangers of privilege, and how the College chapel could be tapped for the benefit of the school. Robert wears his spirituality lightly, but it governs his life.

A potential problem facing NCS is that it could become a school within a school: under the College statutes established by the founder, William of Wykeham, the choristers are its *raison d'être*. Half the members of the choir may be boys, but they are as fully professional as the lay clerks or even members of the London Symphony Orchestra. Being a chorister can be very hard work and requires holiday- and weekend-killing levels of dedication, but it is also undeniably glamorous. Robert's genius as Headmaster was to avoid the school-within-a-school pitfall and to

deal calmly and wisely with the myriad problems a foundation choir inevitably throws up for the boys and their families. For him, every boy is important; the choristers never became an elite subset, and there are no second-class citizens at NCS. Of course music *is* important – for any boy who aspires to it. Robert has worked extremely hard to maintain a delicate balance, enriching every aspect of school life, from music and drama to science and sport. Yet he must have mixed feelings about leading a school so closely connected with a famous all-male choir, because his daughters are fine singers who, as little girls, would have been denied the experience. Understanding this central paradox is one of the reasons he has been such a successful Headmaster of a boys' school.

I have many happy memories of Robert's time at NCS. The annual Shakespeare play in the ante-chapel, skilfully adapted by Matt Jenkinson and himself, produced and acted with tremendous confidence, was much anticipated; the encircling chorus, involving so many boys, was always a *tour de force*. Then, sitting next to Robert at National Cathedral in Washington DC when our choir joined the residents as well as that from St Thomas's Fifth Avenue in New York, and beaming with pride as the boys shone in a moving performance of Tallis's 40-part motet *Spem in alium*. Basking in the sun with Robert and Louise on the steps of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, after a gruelling tour and hearing about the Gullifer family's latest epic transcontinental train journey. And perhaps most memorable was Richard Poyser's wonderful musical *David and Goliath* performed in the Sheldonian Theatre in June 2016. I could not have

wished for a better present upon my own retirement than the video of that performance.

Robert is a combination of Thomas Arnold and Mr Chips: a visionary head as well as a much-loved teacher. This brief account can only be incomplete, because much of what transpired between us, certainly some of the more interesting ups and downs, should remain confidential. But I look forward to reading Robert's memoirs! New College, the independent education sector, his colleagues and generations of boys owe him a great debt of gratitude. I'm very lucky that my time at New College coincided with his and wish him a happy retirement.

2

“Engaging my mind and
my heart in friendship”

Clarisa Rucabado Butler

Do I remember when I met Robert for the very first time? Although the actual moment of that momentous (it was) encounter cannot be fixed in a precise date or time of day (but *it was* 1992 and the place *was* Wimbledon, inside King’s College School), the location is clear in my mind. In fact, I can visualise Robert easily, walking towards me along the lower corridor connecting the School’s reception with the door leading to the quadrangle in his inimitable light step, friendly smile, well-cut suit, and fantastically unique, flamboyant even, bow tie. It is the first time that a colleague of mine wears one, and although unsure of what it means, I am hooked by the vision of a contemporary (I will soon learn that we were born weeks apart) who dons such an uncommon, in my experience, *accoutrement* among thirty-three year olds. Many more surprises await me.

Needless to say, he does not just pass me by; undoubtedly, he stops to introduce himself and ask in turn, genuinely interested, about me ... the rest is almost history. Well, English rather, because it was in fact around language and words and discussion, that I,

a humble teacher of Spanish, an old entrant to the profession, an accented slightly eccentric Spanish damsel in distress (well, not quite, it is true, but definitely rather disoriented in that very British institution: a public school) was befriended in such a splendid, genial and congenial, intelligent and humorous manner by the then newly-appointed Head of English at KCS, and now retiring New College School Headmaster, Mr Robert Gullifer, esquire.

Or was it *the upper* corridor, a very narrow, short and dark affair nevertheless connecting the hallowed chambers of the Headmaster and his deputies, with possibly two of the best classrooms in the school, which happened to be, of course, the room of Mr Gullifer and that of Mr Lawrence? But had Robert already moved to this grand classroom, privilege of the Heads of English in 1992? The lovely Derek Pembrey was still at school, albeit not as Head for much longer; did he keep his room? Memory and memories ... Mnemosyne come to my aid!

The very quarters have changed out of almost all recognition and it is sad to have to record, here and now, that the wonderful teaching room, with its mantelpiece and gracious windows, its fine views onto the tarmacked hard-play area and, beyond, the green playing fields, and in which so many generations of students (and in particular, let's imagine here and now Robert's, loving his scholarly teaching, wide-ranging knowledge, and quirky asides; enjoying their learning, dreading some work, or having fun at break time) is, alas, no longer a room full of young people engaged in study: the room is now *the Headmaster's study*.

From the corridors of power to the Din(n)ing Halls of Hell (it is a figure of speech, the hell suggested by the racket of all those young and older people rushing in to queue for food, by the clattering of cutlery on plates, by the loud conversations above all that racket). Many a lunchtime, Robert would engage me and others in totally interesting conversation. He was (and is) a conversationalist of quality and acumen. Be it on art – music, painting, architecture – politics or ethics, or a book, a lively discussion would ensue; luckily, it had very little to do with the mundanities of school life or student shenanigans (what a relief).

But perhaps I should set down here a shocking incident which has lodged for ever in my well-brought-up mind (thanks, *mamá*). The day in which impossibly proper Robert used his left-index finger to propel a little morsel of something up his fork. (Yes, Robert, you did it, and I was utterly flabbergasted!) Don't ask me why or what was the delectable foodstuff that needed finishing, I can only assure you that it happened and that I learned a lesson: sometimes one needs to reject convention (yes, *mamá*!) in order to facilitate progress. As per usual, Robert delivered that caveat with total panache.

Somehow those lunchtime discussions must have lit the proverbial bulb in Robert's brain and in little time I was cajoled, in the most urbane and persuasive manner, to join the ranks of probably the most illustrious, long-standing, and arguably most useful of ECAs (or, in longhand, Extra-Curricular Activities), Debating. Yes, yours truly – remember the accent, the eccentricity, the stridency at times – was to be part of the holiest of clubs: the Debating Society. Robert, Jayne and I were the team to which later on Simon

would add his own blend of spice. Robert had organised the society in a most functional and gentlemanly mode. We only needed to attend together one meeting per term to vote and organise the programme of motions and debaters' teams, as we then took turns to chair the debates and so we only had to attend one Friday afternoon every three (and then four) weeks. This was, without doubt, the halcyon days of the society. Sadly, when Robert left and Jayne went part-time, those left had to increase attendance.

Another crucial task of the team during the Summer Term was to choose the debater of the year. He (It had to be a *he* as girls were only admitted to the Sixth-Form many years later in 2010) was chosen generally from the Upper Sixth contingent. The coveted prize ensured that the name of the winner would be engraved on the trophy (a gavel on a stand) for all eternity. I still remember the discussion in June 1996 which led us to a rather wicked Salomonic decision: for the first time in the history of the society there would be a joint award; we were to link forever the names of the most politically-aware, pugnacious and antagonistic of debaters of the previous four years: the ultra-conservative Mr **JJ**, and the left-wing revolutionary Mr **IW**. (A quick Google search has revealed that Mr **JJ** is now the editor of **BrexitCentral**, an opinion website, and Mr **IW** is recruitment director of **Think Ahead**, a graduate scheme into mental-health social work.) On the last day of the academic year, when prizes were read, they were both seen to leave their chairs and march from two very different camps towards the Headmaster, Mr Robin Reeve, who, I am sure, had raised his eye with some glee when reading the prize list and found those two names together ...

yet another instance of Robert's subtle undermining of the status quo.

Data is fickle, memories difficult to put into paper properly, recollections of dialogue impossible to pin down ... and when what you are trying to express is in fact even more subtle - a feeling, a warmth of recognition, an acknowledgment of gratitude for making me welcome, for engaging my mind and my heart in friendship - then, as a better mind than mine has said "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." But not before wishing Robert a wonderful, productive and interesting, fun after-teaching years with Louise and his great daughters, the delightful Emma and Hetty with whom I spent, so many years ago, a lovely afternoon looking at pictures: "Carnation, lily, lily, rose..."



John Singer Sargent, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885-86.
Oil on canvas, 174 x 154 cm, Tate

3

“Turn disaster into triumph”

Philip Swan

It is every retired teacher’s lot to be haunted in dreams by terrible mishaps, such as teaching the wrong syllabus or forgetting to take a lesson, or even failing to teach a particular class for a whole year, which is one of my recurring nightmares. One such real episode sticks in my mind, which demonstrates vividly how Robert is able to turn disaster into triumph and leads me to believe that he will possibly be the exception and not have his sleep disturbed by such horrors.

In 1995, I believe I was the only member of the English Department at King’s College School, Wimbledon to choose Thomas Hardy’s *Wessex Tales* as a set text for GCSE English Literature. At the beginning of the year, I went to the bookshop and chose what I was told was the cheapest edition for the boys to buy. This particular group of candidates was extremely intelligent and enjoyed working on the text. Their expectations were high and I had every confidence in their success.

On the day of the exam, I was confronted by boys from my set who told me that the selection for the

‘Comment and Appreciation’ (optional) question came from a tale that they had never encountered. I discovered to my horror that the edition of *The Wessex Tales* that I had taught was not the one prescribed by the exam board. Both editions contained most of the same tales with one or two additions in the board’s prescribed edition. I had dreadful visions of irate parents demanding my immediate dismissal and a string of dismal results. Robert, as Head of Department, took the matter in hand.

He wrote to the board explaining the error and managed to justify my choice of text by pointing out that - as a distinguished Hardy scholar - I, of course, made the natural assumption that the first edition selection, favoured by Thomas Hardy himself, was the only one the board could possibly have sanctioned. The board somehow felt suitably chastised and promised to make allowances in the case of all my candidates for having their choice of questions limited in this way.

As it turned out, the results were unusually spectacular. I did not receive any parental complaints as Robert had so brilliantly handled the situation and had reassured them that all would be well. It amuses me to this day that there were two boys who perversely chose to tackle the ‘Comment and Appreciation’ question on a tale that they had never read and succeeded in achieving full marks. I used this as an example to future candidates that in ‘Comment and Appreciation’ answers it is vital to concentrate only on the literary merits of the passage itself!

Robert is a genius at never making his colleagues feel bad about themselves. Furthermore, he has the brilliant knack of being able to ask one to do anything without ever causing any resentment, irritation or bad feeling. What a skill that is. Perhaps it is that he has no resentment, irritation or bad feelings about others that makes this possible. But, best of all, he was able to laugh about the situation afterwards with such obvious delight. It was a privilege to work with Robert at King's at a time when the school was most happy and his English department the happiest department in the school.

I hope that Robert will not have nightmares in his retirement. He does not deserve them. If he does, it will as a result of working with such wayward colleagues of which I must have been one of the worst.

4

“An instinctive understanding of young people”

Vivienne Durham

The late Kenneth Durham, Headmaster of University College School (UCS) and Chairman of HMC, was a friend and colleague of Robert’s for thirty years. Ken was not a man given to effusive or undue praise. However, from their earliest days as colleagues at KCS, Wimbledon, Ken held Robert in the very highest professional esteem and would frequently extol the quality of his teaching, his literary scholarship – or both. Ken valued Robert’s pursuit of the very highest standards in all aspects of education. Above all, Robert has always shown unerringly good judgment and a sense of perspective.

Ken was delighted to learn that Robert had been appointed to New College School: “The perfect appointment: the governors have got that one spot on.” Ken was also mindful of what a tremendous asset Louise would be to any school lucky enough to appoint Robert Headmaster and knew what a strong fit NCS would be for Louise’s own exceptional academic legal career.

Above all, Robert has always exemplified the two most important qualities of any great Headmaster: an instinctive understanding of young people and a ready wit. That Robert is an exceptionally gifted musician, in addition to his own academic learning, has been one of the many, many achievements he wears so lightly.

Ken felt honoured to be asked to be a governor at New College School, although he usually declined requests to join governing boards. Ken enjoyed seeing the school go from strength to strength under Robert's leadership and was delighted to contribute to the governance of NCS for many years, recognising that complex decisions would enable the school to improve its facilities beyond recognition and flourish as never before.

Robert deserves to be a legend in his own lifetime.

5

“Great enthusiasm and a convincing
accent”

Stephen Richards

This valedictory tribute comes from grateful parents, but ones who have no connection with New College School. It arises out of the contact that I and my wife, Lucy, had with Robert Gullifer in an earlier period of his career. It remains relevant, however, because the many fine qualities he displayed during that period leave us in no doubt that his appointment as Headmaster of New College School was an excellent decision and that the School has been very fortunate to have had him as its Headmaster for so many years.

Robert was a master at King’s College School, Wimbledon in the 1990s when our two sons were pupils there (and during the latter part of the period I was also a member of the school’s governing body). We formed a very high regard for him. He had an obvious depth of intellect and breadth of vision. His manner was gentle but firm. He got on well with others and commanded their respect and confidence. That applied in relation to members of staff and boys alike. Even our younger son, who had substantial dealings with the staff as vice-captain of the school, commented at the time that Robert stood out as an Under-Master who got his work done without fuss and without

ruffling feathers among other members of staff. It was quite an achievement to be noticed in that way by one of the boys.

He was an inspirational teacher of English. It appeared to be largely due to his influence that our younger son found English the most stimulating of his A-Level subjects and decided to pursue it (together with Classics) at University. That son still recalls Robert reciting Chaucer “with great enthusiasm and a convincing accent” to his A-Level pupils (and they were not an easy group to convince).

He showed a deep interest in the welfare and performance of boys under his care, displaying a genuine appreciation of the very different characteristics and skills of different children and encouraging them to develop and take pride in their natural talents. He was the “tutor” (responsible for pastoral care) to both our sons, and in that capacity he was a tower of strength when our elder son suffered from bullying. He was easy to approach, displayed a real interest and concern, talked at length to our son in order to gain a full understanding of what was happening, and then talked to the others involved in a way that brought the problem to a rapid end. No parent could have asked for more from a master.

His musical interests and abilities were well known throughout the school. In recalling that Robert was in charge of hymn practice, our younger son observes that it was “no mean feat to encourage four hundred adolescent boys to sing with more passion and tunefulness” and adds that “he sometimes achieved it”.

We are delighted to have this opportunity to wish Robert and Louise all the very best for what promises to be a very busy future for them both following his retirement from the headship.

6

“Everything would work out in the end”

Jacqueline Whitaker

When I joined the English department at King’s College School in 1988, Robert, then its youngest member, was already firmly established, both within the department and more widely in the school. His musical talents made him indispensable to school assemblies as well as the chamber choir. That he was happy at King’s, he revealed in a conversation we had in my first year at the school. Robert believed that we were in a uniquely enviable position, teaching the very brightest pupils, who truly valued the opportunities the school gave them.

At this time Robert also offered a very popular General Studies class on choral music, which required participants to spend much of the class listening, with eyes closed, to Robert’s choice of music. Perhaps inevitably, the choral music class became known in the Sixth Form as “choral snoozing”. Another of Robert’s responsibilities was the annual middle school play, in which he would try to involve as many boys as possible. As I was the only woman in the English department (and only one of only six in the senior school common room), costuming these large casts naturally (!) fell to me. Productions such as *The Scarlet*

Pimpernel and *The Sneeze*, Michael Frayn's compilation of Chekhov's comic plays, were as much fun to work on as to watch.

The pinnacle of Robert's directorial career at King's was reached in his production of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, part of the school's celebration of the bicentenary of Mozart's death. Robert inventively marshalled the combined forces of choir, orchestra and actors to produce moments of sheer magic, the most moving being the entrance of the masked choir, all in black, singing the *Lacrimosa* from Mozart's *Requiem*. Such an ambitious endeavour was not without its anxieties, particularly as Salieri was unable to master his lines until the first night. This must have severely tested Robert's belief that everything would work out in the end. But this would not have been obvious to his colleagues, as he would not have allowed such concerns to show.

When Robert took over the reins in the department, the transition was remarkably smooth, almost seamless. Building on the collegiate system of his predecessor, Derek Pembery, Robert forged excellent working relations with the other members of the department. Working with him could not have been easier; in all activities he was a most generous colleague, whose quiet efficiency ensured a calm and collaborative environment. We became a group of friends, who could boast (and examination results testified to this) that they belonged to the best English department in the country.

Robert's great gift was to trust his staff, but also to know where and when help was needed. This was

certainly the happiest time of my career, and I am sure it was a special time for Robert, only bettered by his later appointment to New College School. But time does not stand still. It brought the introduction of the International Baccalaureate, and despite initial reservations about its effect on the status of English in the Sixth Form, Robert wisely decided it was best to embrace it, let his department lead the way, and make a success of it.

Robert's promotion to the position of Undermaster showed how easily he could juggle both management and departmental responsibilities. I would marvel at his ability to clear his desk by the end of each day. Such efficiency was clearly the outcome of much concentrated hard work. By this time, however, Louise was already working in Oxford, so we knew that a move, and further promotion, was on the cards for Robert. The close friendships nurtured in these years, cemented by numerous departmental dinners and other occasions for celebration, were bound to endure in spite of these changes. And I am very happy to say that they have.

7

“Quiet, calm deliberation
disentangles every knot”

Paul Dean

What makes someone angry is often a good indicator of their character. I have never seen Robert Gullifer angry, nor has anyone else as far as I am aware. Anger would be far too undignified a state for him. But I know some things which make him indignant: incivility; sloppy or muddled thinking; cutting corners.

Fastidious in mind as in dress and manner, Robert is a product of the Cambridge English School with its tradition of a rational approach to intellectual matters. Yet nobody could be less of a coldly utilitarian character. The fondness for Victorian ballads and parlour songs, the attachment to Anglican hymnody, the mischievous glee when something strikes him as absurd, point to other qualities: open-heartedness, generosity of feeling, even a kind of romanticism. That comes out too in his singing, in that fine voice with which he is blessed.

I don't know whether *The Gondoliers* is among Robert's favourite G&S operas, but there is a line in it which sums up his gifts as an administrator: 'Quiet, calm deliberation disentangles every knot'. Robert has

been a Deputy Headmaster twice in his career, and he performed this most thankless of roles with consummate skill and professionalism.

He chaired Heads of Departments' meetings with courtesy and patience; he never imposed his view or denied anyone, however tedious, a fair hearing; his solutions were accepted as the products of genuine disinterestedness. Nobody had a bad word to say about him, either to his face or behind his back. Seasoned teachers will realise what an achievement that is. His experience of both senior and prep schools gave him unusual breadth of understanding and the detachment to see education from both ends of the age range. As his Head of Department, I knew I could rely on his English teaching to be energetic, stimulating, entertaining and rigorous. His mere presence in the room imposed respect and co-operation.

Sadly, our paths crossed less often after he moved to NCS, but I know what a transformation he has wrought there. A Headmaster who has also been a Deputy, the clearing-house for Common Room grumbling, knows exactly how to behave - which largely means knowing how *not* to behave. He was too wise, and too sincerely interested in all that was going on, to be a remote figure taking refuge in his study, but nor did he imagine he could run all the departments better than the people whose job it was to do so.

On one visit I accompanied him on his weekly story-reading session to the youngest pupils. He enchanted them with his narrative skill, including doing all the funny voices. His daily attendance in the College chapel will also have given encouragement to the

choristers. 'Where else could you get paid for going to Evensong every day?' he remarked to me once, with evident contentment. His annual Shakespeare productions with Matt Jenkinson have involved him in yet another dimension of his pupils' lives.

Robert is a devoted family man, and he made the school an extension of his family, but without falling into the trap of making his family an extension of the school. Dr Jenkinson is indeed fortunate in his inheritance, and in the fact that that kindly eye will continue to beam upon him for a while yet. We have all basked in its warmth, and been the better for it.

8

“Commitment, culture,
courtesy and charm”

Paul Baker

I knew Robert Gulifer first when he was Deputy Head (Academic) at the Dragon School and came to admire him greatly over the few years he was there. It was in 2008, when he asked me to take on the role of Professional Tutor at New College School, that I began to really appreciate his role as a leader, manager and friend.

Robert has taken NCS forward in many ways since becoming the Headmaster there. It is the exceptional developments in academic vigour, allowing all pupils to obtain positive learning attitudes and experiences while enhancing the boys’ curiosity that will mark Robert’s years at the helm. His encouragement of good behaviour without dulling pupils’ exuberance, the development of the drama, and of course the music, have all allowed every pupil to have both an outstanding education and a varied cultural experience.

Robert can be summed up by four words: commitment, culture, courtesy and charm. He is a man of music and a musical man. I wish him and Louise all the very best for their future roles. Hopefully I will catch up with them either in Oxford or even Cambridge in future years.

9

“A master in diplomacy”

James Horton

The events portrayed in this piece are [almost] totally fictitious and any resemblance to an actual person, place, thought or opinion is [almost] purely coincidental.

It is Friday and at precisely 8am, and not a moment before, Robert walks with brisk purpose onto the playground, smartly dressed, smiling and ready for the day ahead. After the mutual admiration of ties sported by the Senior Leadership Team, he notes that the uncanny coordination can only be the product of such a well-managed and cohesive group. Conversations turn swiftly to the issues of the day as the Deputy Head anxiously looks at the cover sheet in his hand. There is a shared moment of humour with a parent or two, occasionally interrupted by a wayward football in the face swiftly followed by a profuse apology from a rather embarrassed pupil. The boy’s apology is accepted – clearly, the message of the school’s motto ‘Manners Makyth Man’ is working well.

At 8.15am, one of the few bells of the day rings out. Lines of boys begin to form - some quicker than others - *‘Will the boys in Year [X] please follow the example*

of the other boys and line up quickly and quietly.' The teaching staff emerges and leads the boys into school for registration. *'Mr Gullifer would you have a second...?'* asks a parent who has been patiently hovering in the background, waiting for an opportune moment. Robert endeavours to carefully balance the need to respond with full attention whilst also considering how to get to Assembly on time without breaking school rules by having to run down the corridors. At 8.30am, without any sign of breathlessness, Robert delivers his presentation in a fairly precise twelve minutes, and after a little frantic switching from PowerPoint to YouTube, he enjoys a moment of pleasure as the boys sing out the hymn of the day with the heartiness, musicality and precision that only a choir school can achieve. Perfect! Then it's off to the first lesson and classroom work begins.

Back in his study, Robert has time to catch up with emails, phone calls and preparation for the various meetings of the day. A strong coffee is always helpful and gratefully received. In what seems like an instant, it is break-time and whilst trying to keep a watchful eye on the buzzing playground, Robert makes himself available to colleagues in order to deal with the myriad questions and issues that have arisen. After break, a sense of calm returns and there is time to meet with the Director of Sport and catch up on all the school sports news of the week. There is just time for a quick trip around the school to check all is well. Sprinting over to College for a meeting with the Warden allows time for discussion of the latest plans (the fifth draft?) for the new school building. Goodness - is that the time? 12.55pm - it's going to be a speedy five minute lunch before afternoon lessons.

The afternoon begins with the Pre-Prep ‘Star of the Week’ announcement in the library. Lots of expectant little faces await the exciting news and, after a jolly drum-roll, all is revealed. Applause and praise over, all attention is now on the Headmaster with eager anticipation for the weekly story time. The tale from Robert’s hastily chosen book is embellished with animated gestures and his not inconsiderable repertoire of amusing voices. It’s such fun – and the boys enjoy it too ... Then back to the study for a meeting on catering matters.

By now it is 3pm and time to really start focusing on the weekly Newsletter to parents. *‘What educational issues have cropped up during this week?’ ‘What questions of an ethical, spiritual or moral nature have arisen in the Assemblies and Chapel Service?’ ‘How can I test my inner thesaurus to the maximum?’* The 3.45pm deadline for the newsletter passes unnoticed as a somewhat anxious parent drops in to discuss possible choices of schools for her son in five years time. Revised newsletter deadline: 5pm. As school ends, there is just time to pop out onto the playground to engage with as many parents as possible. The after-school clubs are now busily underway and, thank goodness, there’s time to put those finishing touches to the newsletter – but a knock at the door – surely it’s not the Deputy Head again! It’s now 5pm – quick – press SEND – all done!

In a few moments of peace, Robert has just enough time to practise some sonorous notes on his double bass, before running up to the Headmaster’s lodgings to grab his gown and dash off to New College chapel

for Evensong. Time to enjoy the peace, serenity and prayer as the angelic voices of the choristers resound ... but just what does chorister [X] think he is doing pulling silly faces at chorister [Y]? Mental note: see chorister [X] first thing tomorrow morning. Evensong over, it's time to welcome chorister parents for drinks in the Headmaster's lodgings and after many cheerful conversations, there's finally a moment to unwind with a welcome glass of vintage red wine from the rather well-stocked (but thankfully not too well-known) New College wine cellars before the next day begins with Saturday Music School.

Robert became Headmaster of New College School in September 2008. I met him for the first time during the year before when he visited the school and, like all staff, I was both curious and not a little anxious to know what the new Headmaster was like and what he might be planning. To be greeted with a firm handshake, warm smile and good eye contact was naturally reassuring and following a brief conversation infused with his characteristic and very welcome light good humour, I was confident that Robert was going to be an approachable Headmaster with whom I could get on. A decade on from then and my first impressions have proven right - I am immensely proud of the excellent working relationship we have developed and enjoyed over the past ten years.

In 2011 I was delighted to be chosen by Robert as his Deputy Head. When the phone rang and Robert offered me the post I was genuinely surprised but the

role proved to be a real joy; a wonderful end to my career in teaching and I am very grateful for the opportunity to have played my part in the leadership team at NCS.

Robert was initially a shrewd observer of the school. He then swiftly but with great care and customary tact (he is a master in diplomacy) introduced changes that were to shape the whole ethos of the school and set the course of his Headship. Bells became a thing of the past, so that staff had to keep a careful eye on the time in order to keep the school moving along. Perhaps some of us were a little sceptical at first about how this would work but it proved to be a very subtle and effective way of keeping the school quieter and calmer. The change was accompanied by Robert's insistence that any form of shouting (by pupils and staff) was not conducive to the peaceful environment he sought to create.

Once again, staff wondered about discipline and control. The integration of the 'Family Links' programme into our pastoral care provided many answers and was particularly effective in helping staff to modify their approach to pupil management. Good results quickly became apparent throughout the whole of school life and the principles of positive reinforcement of good behaviour, nurturing empathy amongst the pupils, and adopting a more thoughtful, reflective approach to building good working relationships became fundamental in creating the warm and friendly family-centred school NCS is today. It was clear from the outset that Robert had a distinctive vision for the school. His commitment to NCS is unquestionable and he has worked many long

hours to ensure that NCS would become a leading independent prep school capable of capitalising fully on its unique place within the New College foundation.

In pursuing his aims, Robert has shown immense but characteristically quiet determination combined with a consistent willingness to engage with and listen to colleagues, governors, parents and pupils alike. A passionate educationalist, Robert has maintained a deep interest in pedagogical research. The application of these ideas has enriched the school community, allowing it to develop and flourish in educational attainment in its widest sense. The need to improve educational provision with cutting edge technology has been carefully balanced with the desire to develop individual character and values amongst the pupils. The success of Robert's leadership has seen NCS become an oversubscribed, sought-after and friendly scholarly community. Never someone who would rest on his laurels, Robert's strong yet creative work ethic and quest for educational excellence are plain to see – readers of the school's weekly newsletter will need no convincing.

In terms of the day-to-day management of the school, Robert makes multi-tasking the norm having the ability to deal with tricky and sensitive issues whilst maintaining good humour and a firm sense of perspective. Invariably positive and upbeat, he has the capacity for patience even with problems weighing heavily in the background. On a personal note, I always felt supported and that my work in French or as Deputy Head and my commitment to NCS have been greatly appreciated. The cohesion and sense of trust within the Senior Leadership Team and its collegiate

spirit was almost wholly down to Robert's sensitive management and commitment to fostering good relations and developing his team.

I have already mentioned Robert's good humour - he has it in abundance. Behind closed doors, he would often lighten the atmosphere with an amusing anecdote or a sharply observed witticism. Happily, we both share a love of mimicry, Robert being adept in this skill whether the subjects are well-known political figures, or sometimes, dare I say, those closer to home. The inevitable hilarity could on occasion be the perfect antidote to an otherwise stressful and demanding situation.

No one would call Robert a distant Headmaster. His enjoyment in all forms of school life is clear to see: whether dressing up as a character in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* for World Book Day, compering Sports Day suitably attired in traditional boater and smart linen suit, delighting in his many performances (usually as the King of somewhere) in a Pre-Prep drama production, and of course his hearty performances in the Choral Society. Music, of course, is Robert's passion. He gains much pleasure from listening to the boys' hymn singing every morning in assembly and in choosing the hymns in advance. In the absence of the Director of Music he will happily take on that role in the traditional Friday hymn practice providing enthusiastic demonstrations to the boys. He shows a keen and genuine interest in all the boys' achievements whether musical, academic, sporting or simply developments in their character.

Robert has been a much-loved Headmaster at NCS. As he looks to the future and the various projects in his new role within the New College foundation, he can do so knowing that he leaves the school in an excellent position from which to continue its development. Indeed he has developed a considerable reputation throughout Oxford and beyond. It has been my great privilege to work alongside Robert for ten years and I wish him much happiness and fulfilment in all his new pursuits, and of course, many wonderful memories of his time at NCS.

10

“An unassuming man
with a huge aura”

Giles Wordsworth

I can still vividly remember the entire layout of New College School, from the location of each room, down to each stair. When I was younger, and I wasn't Head Boy and therefore not carrying out duties alongside him, I remember being in awe of Mr Gullifer and his entourage. His calm presence invited obedience; his high expectations garnered our respect. Somehow, Mr Gullifer managed to make our daily assembly both not boring (quite the accomplishment) and something that I now miss. I loved how he would give us new food for thought each day, moulding us into the people we are now.

I remember my first meeting with him: his large wooden table by that great old window and the walls of books with this gentle, regal man standing closely by. I was surprised that he knew my father's name and even had a copy of his book, rather than just William Wordsworth; this small but very personal note meant a great deal to my younger self and I immediately saw him as someone to look up to. Mr Gullifer created the perfect environment for us. I can still imagine the atmosphere around the school. For me the epitome of

the enthusiasm and childish delight was the phrase, “Get the goals!”. To the uninitiated in the NCS playground there are two sets of goals and the year who got there first with a ball could play with them. I can still see my younger self running outside eagerly. This type of drive, motivation and joy was present in all of my time there.

For some reason or another, I remember clearly the more stressful moments. One of these memories is the one of being called out of my maths lesson by Mr Gullifer. I remember the feeling of rattling my brain for all the possible things I could have potentially done wrong! Happily for me, however, I was asked to be the Chancellor’s Page. This honour was made all the better when I ran into Mr and Mrs Gullifer at Encaenia, where his demeanour was as per usual the jolly, inspiring Headmaster we had all come to trust and admire.

Singing with him was a surreal experience. When my brother and I sang in Mr Poyser’s Chamber Choir on special occasions, I remember hearing Mr Gullifer as an ebullient bass in the back. Less formally, I remember him, having walked in with his hand over his breast carrying his red hymn book just like the one we each had, singing with us in our assemblies every morning. The memory of this simple yet heartening tradition still remains with me today.

Walking over to chapel was always the spectacle: a newly organised line of boys eager to be away from lessons moving in detectable waves like lemmings. Entering chapel alongside Mr Gullifer made me feel proud and more important than arguably anything

since. We would say a prayer, a quiet moment before Matthew, the Deputy Head Boy, and I processed in. Reflecting back, I like how Mr Gullifer would give us little warning before asking us to read at chapel – having been given the reading at break time so the walk over being our only chance to practise it. I think my love of public speaking and debating is because of him.

One of my fondest memories was Mr Gullifer's poetry readings at Christmas and Remembrance Day. There was a great contrast between the deep respect and gratitude that he emitted for the old boys, who were on the wall, to the dramatized persona he put on to make every Christmas special. Likewise, each and every one of his mini-sermons were special. I especially remember when he asked us all to look around at the details in the carvings in chapel: the angels flying above us, the cherubs at our elbows and the enormous wall of unusual and strange statues that we spent hours of our life staring at – each one different and remarkable. He asked us to remember that these were carved by men for the glory of God. I believe that he helped all of us become greater individuals and happier through the appreciation of the beauty around us.

In my final year I had the pleasure of being (*finally*) taught by Mr Gullifer. Our philosophy lessons with him were both fun and enlightening as for the first time we experienced him as a more direct role model, hearing his perspectives on the many philosophies we explored. I still have the small pocket-book of philosophy he gave me, and, while looking through it once more, I rediscover all the little notes I have stashed inside. This heavily nostalgic experience

reminds me of all the great moments we had while being taught by him.

*Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

I was recently given a copy of *How Poems Work* by Mr Gullifer and Dr Jenkinson, and reading through this incredible journey across centuries, it was the poem *If* that seemed to me to encompass how I feel writing this tribute. Having lost my father at a young age, it has been men like my beloved grandfather, who I too recently lost, and Mr Gullifer who have been my paternal role models. Mr Gullifer went way above just giving us an enriching education, for he was both a caring mentor and an inspiring leader. He imparted wisdom and fortified us with life's best tools, 'when meeting with Triumph and Disaster'.

It makes me sad to think I can't remember all of those memories. Sad to think he won't be there to greet the new boys. Mr Gullifer was for us an unassuming man with a huge aura. The thought that, if I were to return, I would see his picture up on the wall of past Headmasters, both makes me feel hugely privileged that I got to know him but also regretful for the future boys who won't be as fortunate as me. Memories more emotion than specifics flood: the large trees that we played under, the ancient carvings and hymns, playing in cricket whites, our plays and recitals, the ever-present motto, *Manners Makyth Man*. I find it hard to put it in my own words, so I'll just take someone else's. *τὸ μανθάνειν δ' ἥδιστον εὖ λέγοντος, εἰ κέρδος λέγοι* - it is sweet to learn from the one speaking well, if he speaks profit.



11

“Striving for excellence
without belittling the striver”

Sandie Capel

Dear Robert,

When we first met you were on the candidates’ tour of the school. Will and I were holding up progress as we manoeuvred a trolley up the Science block staircase. It was encouraging that you did not think it too strange to find a Deputy Head involved in such practical matters and even more heartening when the leadership team spoke to you and heard your inspiring vision for the development of the school.

It has been a great privilege to have been with you from those first months of planning, through the early years of establishing the new order, and now to your handing over the Headship to oversee the exciting building and bursary programs.

A new Head and an existing Deputy are thrown together into a form of “arranged marriage”! That I can look back on our relationship so warmly is due to your strengths as a Headmaster, which ring true because they are based on your warm and wise

personal qualities. You have that rare ability to encourage a striving for excellence without belittling the striver. Many pupils have been set firmly on the right path and staff been persuaded out of daft schemes with self-belief intact. When needed, you have been unmovable on a point of principle, perhaps privately furious, but outwardly calm and always fair. Pupils have thrived, parents have been reassured, and teachers have developed in ways they might not have thought possible - all due to your skilful and compassionate care.

The school is full of happy children, who are stretched for the sheer joy of learning and given a wide variety of experiences which will enrich them for life. Scholarships are won, music exams passed, table football skills honed and Shakespeare's plays absorbed, all in the course of a very normal school term.

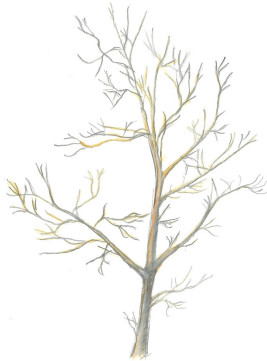
And may I speak for all the staff who you have encouraged to develop into well-rounded educators? You gave us the time to talk about our teaching and helped us to realise dreams. In the midst of all the timetables and curriculum planning, you took the time to choose trees for the school grounds and gave me rein to establish interesting plants about the place. You permitted me an exhausting, but exciting final year of Science teaching, and allowed me the fun of tending the new lab in retirement.

I was asked by a young pupil this year what I did in the lab. He had seen me in my white coat, but couldn't work out my role. I told him I looked after all the equipment in the lab and that it was what old Science

teachers did for fun. He smiled and nodded; he understood exactly!

Thank you Robert for making all this possible.

Sandie



12

“Vision, passion,
judgement and resilience”

Oliver Visintin

I have read that during your lifetime you will meet around eighty thousand people but remember only a fraction of them. I’m quite sure that Mr Gullifer will be one of these and for me, it’s because of the happy memories I’ll carry with me of the years I spent at New College School. His complete involvement in almost every aspect of school life made him a prime example of what every Headmaster should embody: a mixture of vision, passion, judgement and resilience, all of which had a huge impact on me and school life.

I was very lucky to be taught by Mr Gullifer in my final year at New College. Some of my fondest memories in Year 8 were of our close-knit class knocking around ideas and debating the religious topics being discussed in the media at the time. As well as getting through a substantial amount of work during that sixth-month period, Mr Gullifer made the lessons hugely enjoyable and memorable for the five of us.

One event at New College which I particularly enjoyed was College Day, a Wednesday put aside every academic year to celebrate the school’s relationship

with New College. Looking back, I don't think I fully understood how lucky I was to have services and concerts in such a special place. The College Day I particularly remember was in 2015; after the event had finished, Mr Gullifer took the class around the parts of Oxford close to the College and told us the history of the city's streets, houses and shops, most of which I can remember even four years later. Perhaps most importantly, I know I'm sorted if there's ever a general knowledge question about barbers' poles and the art of medieval bloodletting!

I loved the fact that Mr Gullifer was as much involved in the cultural side of school life as the academic. All of his contributions to, and performances in, the Pre-Prep plays were played with his usual dry sense of humour and were the funnier for it. He brought a different comedic level to *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* and *Sleeping Beauty*, for example. Another example of his impact on the younger years of the school was at story-time when on a Friday afternoon he would make time to read to Reception up to Year 2, sharing jokes and being his typically approachable self.

The overall impact Mr Gullifer has had on New College School is immeasurable. I think I speak for many ex-students when I say how grateful we all are for the years we spent there and the opportunities given to us. My experience as Head Boy - of giving readings in assemblies and chapel services; helping out different years in form-time and the Headmaster/Head Boy meetings - will stay with me for a very long time. For this I would like to thank Mr Gullifer for everything he has contributed and wish him a very happy retirement.

13

“Immensely kind and
extremely considered”

Rosemary Cox

It has been a great privilege for me to have worked with Robert throughout his Headship at NCS. I look back over the past eleven years with pleasure and gratitude.

My first significant memory of Robert was a meeting I had with him, shortly after he began his Headship. We shared our views about education, our priorities and values. He asked me what five things I would most like to change or develop in Pre-Prep. I remember thinking that Robert was someone who was genuinely interested in my opinion and open to what I had to contribute. I was struck by his spirit of collaboration. He came across as immensely kind and extremely considered. As the conversation developed, I began to realise that Robert was forward thinking, a man of exacting standards, with a real commitment to providing the highest quality and broadest possible educational opportunities for the pupils in his care.

I also noticed that he had very shiny shoes and very stylish, rather surprising, spotty socks. The socks were particularly significant to me. I felt they gave a hint of a

little mischief lurking beneath the rather quiet, conservative exterior. I was glad the socks didn't disappoint!

It wasn't long before my initial observations were confirmed. Robert was all I had imagined from my first meeting. I am very grateful to him and in awe of all he has achieved. I am especially thankful to him for the freedom he has allowed me to pursue my vision for Pre-Prep and for his leadership, guidance, personal support and friendship throughout the time we have worked together. I am also grateful for the spotty socks, as they gave me the courage to create some rather eccentric cameo appearances for him in my Pre-Prep Pantomimes, much to the delight of parents, boys and colleagues.

The results were extremely amusing. Whether as Baron Hardup in Cinderella, who was a little strapped for cash, but adored clean floors and plumped cushions, or as Mr Riding in Little Red Riding Hood, a burly woodcutter with big strong rippling muscles and a terrifyingly sharp axe, Robert rose to the occasion exhibiting extraordinary flair as an actor with real enjoyment of all things dramatic. As King Gullifer in Sleeping Beauty, he ruled the land wisely, delighting in all that he surveyed. He was loved by all his subjects. The Pre-Prep boys, in their roles, chanted, 'We love you King Gullifer!' I can't help but think that there was genuine feeling in their words.

Robert quickly gained the respect and affection of the pupils in Pre-Prep. I think it came as quite a shock to him initially, that our smallest pupils could be quite so demonstrative. Frequently in visits to the classrooms,

Robert's lower legs would receive a spontaneous and energetic hug from a small boy. The boys are a little in awe of him, but recognise him as someone they can approach without fear. They are always keen to share their academic triumphs and interests with him and he is always affirming of them. There is nothing they enjoy more than a visit to Mr Gullifer's study with a prized piece of work. And of course, the weekly story time sessions with him have always been a delight, as he makes picture storybooks come alive with humorous expression. His warmth and dedication to Pre-Prep has always been clearly evident and appreciated. He is respected and admired by even the youngest boys. In fact, one small boy even referred to Mr Gullifer as 'King of the School' - a title well earned!

It is hard to put into words the contribution Robert has made to NCS over the time he has been Head. I have seen him create a culture of academic excellence and intellectual curiosity in the pupils under his care. He has inspired colleagues to teach from the heart, drawing out individual creative, academic, artistic, physical and practical talent from the pupils. But more than this, he has not lost sight of those qualities that we would want our pupils defined by, as citizens of the future. These are qualities of mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance of others; qualities of kindness, politeness and gentle care of one another. It is these qualities that I have seen modelled in Robert over the years of his Headship, and reflected in the pupils under his care. And it is this legacy for which I am most grateful.

14

“Tireless hours of hard work”

Tom Barry

I was very lucky during my time at New College School to have the chance to get to know Mr Gullifer well. Indeed, on many occasions, Mr Gullifer helped and supported me in my school life. He always was a great advocate for New College Choir, and it was only on very rare occasions that he would miss a service. Perhaps this was the reason that following the Higginbottoms’ departure it became Mr and Mrs Gullifer’s duty to provide drinks and nibbles for the choir parents on Friday night during the post-Evensong practice. Believe me, it did not go unappreciated. His support for the choir was not limited to snacks and drinks, however, as he came with the choristers on many of our tours and gave up his time to watch over us and provide the occasional emotional support when being away from home became a little too much.

Back at school, Mr Gullifer’s ability to come up with a seemingly endless selection of fascinating assemblies astounds me to this day. Of course, there were some seasonal ones that came around every year, my personal favourites being St George’s Day and May Day. On a more personal level, Mr Gullifer helped me practise my interview technique in the run-up to my

senior school pre-test in Year 5. This practice was invaluable, and I doubt that I would have got into the school that I did without it. In my final year, I also had the privilege of being taught RSP by him and he really sparked a passion for philosophy that I didn't know I had.

There is, of course, a side of Mr Gullifer that I was lucky enough to never have to see, in his dealing with misbehaviour. It would have to be a pretty serious misdemeanour to merit Mr Gullifer's wrath, but I know it to have happened, and those on the receiving end found it a harrowing experience. Something that always impressed me about Mr Gullifer was that, despite all his other responsibilities, he still found time to pursue his hobbies and interests. I know for a fact that he learns the double bass and even got a grade 5 distinction, which is no mean feat.

Above all, however, I think Mr Gullifer will be remembered for the tireless hours of hard work he put into developing NCS. From the little everyday changes that make the school have personality, or writing the newsletter every week, to the large changes like planning the new buildings or organising open mornings, he really sank his heart and soul into our little community on a cul-de-sac in the centre of Oxford. Even though he might be coming to the end of his tenure, his heartfelt work will last for a lot, lot longer.

15

“A gentle hand and a listening ear”

Caroline Showell-Rogers

When Robert arrived at NCS in September of 2008, the school was in need of fresh perspective, a gentle hand and a listening ear; and, not to mention, central heating. Although, on the surface the boys were much the same as today’s boys, the climate in the school was one that was at times heated and boys did not always feel appreciated and more often would fearfully retreat from staff. If I remember correctly from one inset day in that first year, Robert’s first drive was simply to encourage staff to be gentle with the boys, even to those with flaming red tempers. I think that his first priorities were to empower the boys, raise their sense of independence, create a climate of mutual respect between teachers and children and most importantly, pass on his love of singing hymns.

I was quite a newbie to teaching at that point; my experience amounted to training in my homeland of Canada, two years teaching teenaged Kuwaiti and Emirate girls and on my arrival to England, a short part-time stint as a Head’s P.A. and maternity cover at a nearby prep school. I think I was quite lucky to squeak my way into NCS, considering my lack of experience and my foreign training. Robert, one year

later after my arrival, faced with an eclectic staff team with varying degrees of experience (including the very 'green' me) rallied us together. First, he hired one of the country's leading early modern historians, Matt Jenkinson (one day to be Headmaster of the school) to take on the teaching of History - a wise decision as I was at that point relying on a battered copy of *Our Island History* to introduce me (and my Year 6 class) to my newly adopted home. Robert's study door remained open, all visitors were welcome and no concern was too small. He seems to have never wavered from this approach and surely by now after so many years of intent listening, he must have the equivalent to a rugby player's cauliflower ear.

However, he was always a clever listener. Colleagues would arrive at his office laden and Robert, responding with a string of comforting murmurs and an outpouring of compliments and encouragement, bent their egos back into shape and absolved any visitor of the worries with which they may have arrived. Nearly every time, upon reflection, visitors realized that circumstances had not really changed but that Robert had somehow, with a sprinkle of his charm, helped that day's visitor restore perspective to their situation and helped them regain momentum. I do not kid: teachers would dance into the staff room after such visits, light footed, comparing notes and frustratingly realize that they too had fallen for Robert's magic touch.

The best coaches avoid imparting their own advice and rather offer guidance through careful questioning. A number of times I went to him, hoping that he would spell out the way forward, but really those visits turned

into questioning and listening, and in me would stir a renewed aspiration to carve my own path to the next achievement and contribution to school life. It is only through years of striving, reaching upwards, driven by his questions and listening, that I realized that I graduated from being that 'green' teacher in the early days to one that was well seasoned, better able to see the complexity of working in a busy, high achieving school. Of course, I recognize that most of this drive was already innate but carefully he harnessed it to my benefit and that of the school's.

One of the traits I much appreciate is Robert's gentle manner. So often, it seems that a prerequisite for school leadership is ubiquitous volume and character. Robert, on the other hand, is quietly discreet and never pretends to know all the answers. It would be wrong to describe him as understated as he always sports a very smart suit and loves a little bit of pomp and tradition (sorry, I never bought into wearing a gown to chapel). He arrived, flowers in hand, at my home whilst on bed rest in my first pregnancy and quietly sat making gentle conversation at a point when there was very little to be hopeful for, being told the baby would never survive beyond gestation. He surrounds himself with other leaders who, like him, are self-effacing and sincere. Surely, Robert's public desire to reflect on the role God plays in all matters ensured he fought to stay humble in this way and not drift towards the pull of pride.

Robert's generosity cannot only been measured by his listening ear, as with our family he has more than welcomed our boys, Jack (who more than survived) and Eli, despite our doubts about the long term

commitment. It was he who marched me straight out from his study when I arrived to turn down Jack's place in Reception. There was no looking back. This generosity extended to the fortuitous legislative changes to SEND provision in 2014 which required a fully trained SEND teacher to take hold of the reins at NCS. This led to a serendipitous opportunity for me, through Robert's keen eye in spotting key strengths in his staff, to further my training to work with our SEND pupils.

Lastly, I am very grateful that he allowed me to indulge in my interests (most especially good humour) from sharing amusing archival snippets at one random late night NCSPA meeting, dressing up in assemblies to giving me the freedom to pull off whole-school events with never a guarantee of success (I imagine a difficult prospect for Robert who has always been supremely organized and likes to hold his cards in good order, as well as close to him). I wish him well in his retirement and hope one day to read his memoirs of this last decade at New College.

16

“Know thyself”

William Cross

According to the ancient travel writer Pausanias, carved into the Temple of Apollo at Delphi were the ancient words *γνώθι σεαυτόν*: “know thyself”. Since I have left NCS and continued my education in the world beyond, more than ever I feel that this was key the message I learned at school. Under Robert Gullifer I saw a generation of boys grow up happy, confident and comfortable in their own skins. I remember my time at NCS with great fondness and, with this opportunity, am delighted to express my deep gratitude to Robert and all the teachers who looked after us.

My earliest memory of Robert is a talk he gave in morning assembly, not long after his arrival, on the subject of “small acts of kindness”. Throughout the rest of my time there, I remember that manners and decency were a central part of our community: the importance of saying please and thank you, the value of holding open a door for someone, the meaning of treating people as you would wish to be treated yourself. These principles, lightly woven into the fabric of school life, served as a daily guide and meant that none of us ever to feel overlooked. Beyond simple

politeness, I remember all of my friends possessing a deep sense of right and wrong – a desire to live happily alongside each other and help each other along. As with many other matters, Robert demonstrated this not so much by preaching it but by practising it. His words in assembly, characteristically sincere and considered, gained all the more power because he exemplified those values himself, leading the school and its staff with quiet care and attention. “Manners Makyth Man”, far from being an impersonal and distant motto, underpinned many of the lessons I learned at NCS.

Along with that sense of cohesion Robert also brought a great degree of ambition to the school. His vision, as it seemed to me, was that each child could flourish and feel that there were no barriers to his success. As a teacher he guided me through Religious Studies and Philosophy for my scholarship exams and, at every stage, encouraged me to express my ideas as clearly and profoundly as I could: to be curious about the world, to link what I was learning with the people around me and apply those lessons to life as well as to the classroom.

Across the year groups, a sense of pride in himself and his friends was instilled in every boy: small school though we were, we each had an important role to play in it. On the sports field this often made us the plucky underdogs, willing to take on bigger, better teams but determined to do ourselves proud. One of my happiest memories is the victory of the U12As at the Dragon Hockey tournament – a David and Goliath moment which was met with thunderous applause when Robert presented us with the trophy in assembly! Music, too, became a feature of life not only for the

choristers but for the whole school as well. Robert led the way in every hymn, and every school concert provided all of us the opportunity to perform in front of our classmates - a lesson not only in trusting ourselves, but in our friends too.

Among the many elements of the education we received, I particularly remember Robert's role in putting together the play with Matt Jenkinson. Performing *Macbeth* at the age of 11 or 12 is no mean feat, and both teachers patiently helped us to understand the words and their meaning. "I am in blood stepped in so far that should I wade no more / Returning were as tedious as go o'er...": a fitting metaphor for the experience of our frustrated directors? Continue to wade we did, and created a fantastic, memorable piece of theatre. Each time I return to the school I am astounded by the progress that continues to be made in every area of school life, the ambition of the teachers, and a sense of plucky creativity that still lives on.

Perhaps the single greatest lesson I learned from Robert was that the loudest voice is not the one that matters most. Under his influence and those of the other teachers at school, I learned to have quiet confidence in myself, belief in my friends and a conviction that it is our actions, however small, which speak loudest. As a small community we depended on each other daily, and I am proud to say that many of those boys I met at the age of 4 in 2003 are still some of my closest and dearest friends.

Robert oversaw a steady evolution in the school's fortunes, but most importantly he ran a school that was

full of happy children. When I left NCS in 2012 all those gestures that went towards sending us off filled me with pride and confidence for whatever came next: the leaver's concert, finishing with an *a cappella* rendition of "Goodnight Sweetheart Goodnight"; sports day, rained off, but with the 100m contested under Craig Bishop's supervision between my friend and I on a sodden grass track; the dinner hosted by Robert and Louise in their home, all of us dressed up and trying to be as grown up as possible.

The school continues to impress me, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have been there while Robert was Headmaster. I wish him every success for the future - and know that, in no small part, much of my own fortune has been down to my time at Robert Gullifer's NCS.

17

“Encouraging and appreciative”

Emma Krebs

When I asked my family how they would describe Robert the following words were used: observant, positive, kind, gentle, reassuring, encouraging, professional, experienced, caring and sympathetic.

I can still remember the first time I met Robert. It was in June 2013 and my husband, Adam, and I came to look around NCS in advance of our son, Josh, coming to the school to do his entry assessment. It was the first school we visited and we felt surprisingly nervous, both as parents but also at the thought of our precious three-year-old heading off to school. Both of us were totally won over by Robert on that first visit. He radiated warmth and charm and couldn't have been more welcoming.

I will never forget the enthusiasm with which he was greeted as we went into the Reception classroom. The boys were literally falling over themselves to greet him and tell him their news. At that moment we knew it was the school for Josh, and for us. I always tell people that Robert absolutely sold the school to us that day and we never looked back. For the next few years Robert's friendliness and enthusiasm made all three of

us fall for the school. There has never been a day when Josh hasn't run in through the school gates and I largely attribute the unique and special environment to Robert's caring and kind nature. His gentle, yet firm, approach makes him much loved by the boys and parents alike. His seasoned assurance makes you feel totally safe leaving your child in his care.

I was lucky enough to be appointed as Head of Science a few years later. Robert has been an incredible Headmaster and I couldn't have asked for a more supportive person to work under. He sets high expectations of his staff but in turn he couldn't be more encouraging and appreciative of their efforts. He has a real gift for making people feel good about themselves and you really feel like you want to go the extra mile for the school. In times of stress he is there to support you and he offers a sympathetic ear when needed.

I will miss Robert enormously when he retires and only wish I could have had longer working with him as a colleague. I know the boys will miss him terribly. It has been such a privilege to work with him for the last two years and he will always hold a special place in the hearts of many of his colleagues, students and their parents.

18

“Do what Mr Gullifer does”

Sammy Jarvis

“If you were Headmaster for the day, what would you do?” is a popular question in senior school interviews. For me, the answer was obvious: “Do what Mr Gullifer does.” I have gradually become more aware of how Mr Gullifer makes New College School such a vibrant and cheerful place during my six years there, and I would like to share a few impressions of my time at the school.

I embarked on the initially daunting escapade of life at New College School as a much smaller, yet as some concur ‘rounder’ version of myself. An eager, but nervous pre-probationer, I soon encountered my fellow choristers (Lyndon, Reuben and Edward) in an introduction to Year 3. My reactions to my classmates varied; for instance Lyndon in particular remembers me giving him a pinched-up sour face after he mentioned his interest in maths. However, due to the generosity and kindness of my peers, I was promptly steered into a friendly and nurturing environment.

I especially recollect my first chapel service. I recall proudly processing over to New College in my dapper school uniform, grateful to be part of this formidable

foundation. Following this magnificent occasion, I reminisce avidly waiting for the honour and opportunity of shaking Mr Gullifer's hand in a chapel service.

One of my earliest memories of Mr Gullifer was in the January of 2013 - my Year 3. Our class had made Christingles, and was enthusiastically lining up, eagerly waiting for our Christingles to be lit. As soon as the rabble had been ordered, we marched to Mr Gullifer's office, protectively clutching our slightly eaten, and wonky Christingles. As we quietly yet apprehensively filed into Mr Gullifer's office, he met us with a warm smile, which reassured us that there was nothing to be afraid of. The subsequent ceremony was gentle and perfectly paced leaving us with an inward beam and a memorable experience. Similarly, every Christmas at New College School, boys are given the opportunity to light the traditional Christmas wreath. These acts reflect Mr Gullifer's kindness to boys and his willingness to include everyone in the life of New College School.

Many of my adventures at New College School with Mr Gullifer have taken place at choir. These occasions were particularly prominent in my younger years at NCS. As a chorister, Mr Gullifer generally introduced me to New College chapel and the services that took place there. For example, one lunchtime in Year 4, Mr Gullifer showed Lyndon, Reuben, Edward and me how to take the collection in chapel. We (speedily) learnt our important roles, before making our way back to music theory. Admittedly, some of the collections ran more smoothly than others; however on the whole, our year's collections went swimmingly.

I recall being thrilled when Lyndon, Reuben, Edward and I each earned a house point after taking our first collection.

Similarly, at New College School the music department has thrived under Mr Gullifer's supervision. He has been exceedingly dedicated to the music at NCS, and has always encouraged it. His commitment to and love of music can be seen through his devotion and enthusiasm towards singing in hymn practice, and his encouragement to boys to learn instruments through his double bass playing. Likewise, Mr Gullifer's fidelity to the choir can clearly be seen by his coming to nearly every service sung by New College Choir. His love of music can also be seen by his favourite hymn, 'Christ is made the sure foundation':

*Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
Binding all the Church in one,
Holy Zion's help forever,
And her confidence alone.*

*To this temple, where we call thee,
Come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
With thy wonted loving-kindness
Hear thy servants as they pray;
And thy fullest benediction
Shed within its walls away.*

*Laud and honour to the Father,
Laud and honour to the Son,
Laud and honour to the Spirit,*

*Ever three, and ever one,
Consubstantial, co-eternal,
While unending ages run.*

This hymn not only has a wondrous melody, it also contains two of Mr Gullifer's favourite words in its penultimate line: 'consubstantial' and 'co-eternal.' These words reflect his passion to educate boys about the English language. From a certain perspective, these two words represent the New College School Mr Gullifer has played an immense part in creating: New College School is consubstantial with the skills that are defined on the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate grid, and a passion for education and music is co-eternal in the ethos of New College School.

19

“The aesthete’s eye”

Richard Poyser

The moment when a Head with whom you have formed a good working relationship leaves and a new Head starts is always a tense one. Will they see the value of what I do at the school? Will they credit me with the changes I have made to improve things, or just think that this is the way things have always been? Will we get on? Will they even value music?

I was incredibly fortunate to have Robert succeed Penny Hindle as Head of NCS - a man who esteemed and valued music; someone who (like me) understood music to be the right of all, not just the elite few; and a very nice man to boot. Robert was a pleasure to work with, and was always supportive.

What was the evidence of this support? Establishing the post of Assistant Director of Music, to help share the teaching and administrative load. Backing (and singing in, with Louise) the NCS Choral Society, and taking the financial losses in his stride. I would occasionally, after a less than full house at a choral society concert, have to go and let Robert know how the books had failed to balance. No reprimands; perhaps a slightly raised eyebrow. Robert understands

the value of the choral society, and the wide benefit it brings to the status of NCS in the community. Thank goodness! Being open-minded about the types of music that appeared in school concerts - rock drumming and pop hits alongside the choir school classical fare. All valued and enjoyed.

It wouldn't be right to skate over the huge improvements Robert made to the diet of hymns (and, indeed, the singing of the hymns) over his time at NCS, though I can't thank him for introducing the tune Rinkart, which I still can't and never will be able to play. Singing Stanford's *Te Deum* in B flat at the end of Trinity in the leavers' final chapel service has become an institution, and encapsulates to a certain extent the music at NCS - with the chapel at its centre, with choristers having their moment, and everyone joining in and adding their voice.

Robert's dry, occasionally caustic, wit brought cheer and a light touch to staff and SLT meetings during my time at NCS. His kindness and his desire to make life better for both staff and pupils meant that everyone felt understood and valued.

Finally, the aesthete's eye that Robert brought to the buildings at NCS has made and will forevermore continue to make a huge difference to the life of the school. When he arrived it was to find a prep school that had not really managed to get into the twenty-first century. There was a long, draughty corridor along the music practice rooms that was open to the elements; the hall was grim; the corridor floors were uniformly a dirty brown linoleum.

He leaves in his wake a bright, clean, warm and cosy school, equipped with superb ICT facilities and (soon to be completed) a brand new purpose-built Pre-Prep that will not only stand the test of time, but may yet be heralded as an architectural achievement in its own right. Quite a legacy. On top of this the choir school, always a fragile eco-system in modern life, has been passed on in excellent health and in high public esteem. All in all a pretty remarkable achievement. Vivat Robert!

20

“An ideal role model to both
pupils and staff”

Rachel Faulkner

As fellow worshippers at St Margaret’s Church in Oxford and with a shared understanding of the role of Headship, I had often found myself chewing the cud on educational matters with Robert over a cup of coffee following a Sunday morning service. I found common ground in our approaches and therefore when Robert asked me if I would consider joining the Governing Committee of New College School I had no hesitation in allowing my name to go forward. Robert’s powers of persuasion had already succeeded in bringing changes to the constitution of the Governing Committee. For the first time in the school’s long history three external Governors, with a broad experience of Headship, were to join elected Fellows from New College on the Committee. The aim was to draw on the shared experience, to provide increased support for the Headmaster and to act as a sounding board when planning the strategic development of the school.

It is clear to me that Robert has been the right Headmaster, in the right school, at the right time. He certainly exemplifies the school motto ‘Manners

Makyth Man' and his eminent suitability for the role of Headmaster has manifested itself in so many other ways. He has valued the traditions of the school whilst also seeking to modernise and adapt its facilities, making it fit for the twenty first century. As an accomplished musician he understands the commitment and aptitude needed by the choristers in their daily practice as well as when fulfilling their vocal role in the Chapel services. He has joined them on overseas concert tours and is proud of their worldwide reputation. He is quick to encourage, praise and offer thanks, acting as an ideal role model to both pupils and staff. He is hospitable and generous ensuring that parents and visitors to the school feel welcomed.

Robert's seemingly boundless energy and enthusiasm is infectious, encouraging others to follow where he leads. Generous with his time and talents he enjoys working collaboratively with colleagues as well as looking after their welfare. Shortcomings in the central heating system were quickly addressed improving the working conditions for everyone! Academic rigour, ambitious expectations and full commitment are also high on his agenda and success is always celebrated.

He enjoys tapping into the academic resources of the University, ensuring that the boys experience other models of expertise. The popular and successful annual College Day is now an established highlight on the school calendar. Pupils view the ancient artefacts and treasures of New College, learning about the enduring relationship between the school and college as well as experiencing the teaching of the Fellows. Creating lasting memories is not a subject on the

school curriculum but it happens regularly at New College School.

Christian values and beliefs underpin all Robert's actions and he is always mindful of the impact and effect on the school when making decisions. He has dealt with challenging situations with compassion and discretion, offering kindness to those involved whether they be pupils, staff, parents or governors. His ability to listen and his excellent communication skills have been an integral part of the smooth running of the school. Not only has he shared information effectively through his weekly newsletter but he has also imparted his philosophy of education, with the occasional wise snippet about parenting thrown in.

During term time I, for one, approach Fridays with eager anticipation waiting for his latest missive to drop into my inbox. As parents of two adult daughters, Robert and Louise have successfully juggled their busy professional careers to fit the demands of their family life. Louise's support behind the scenes and at school events has been unwavering. Robert is therefore appreciative of the time commitment and creative energy that so many parents give when their sons join the school. Having attended many PTA meetings with Robert, I have admired his relaxed style and ability to make everyone feel their contributions are important and valued, despite problems over car parking regularly appearing on the meeting agendas!

Robert can be extremely proud of his achievements at New College School. His strategic development of the school has been thoughtful and well considered. His meticulous planning and preparation for meetings has

been impressive and helpful, thereby ensuring the meetings have been productive. Always consultative he has been keen to discuss his thoughts with senior colleagues and fellow educationalists, whilst exploring significant ideas and options. Never complacent or arrogant he is happy to reassess and revise his plans. He has recruited staff carefully to fit the changing needs of the school, giving opportunities to newly qualified teachers as well as those with experience in other schools.

With his broad experience of teaching elsewhere he has been able to refine and evaluate tried and tested teaching methods whilst remaining open minded. He has relished his work as an Inspector, seeing it as an opportunity to garner new educational ideas and observe different approaches in the classroom. Being out of school in term time inevitably demands good organisation and efficient time management, but that seems to come naturally to Robert.

Making the education of the boys relevant to the life skills they will need in today's world is always at the forefront of Robert's mind. When change is needed he takes up the challenge even though it may not be mainstream. With the advent of electric cars Robert was an early convert and it was not long before an electric charging point appeared in the school playground, reinforcing the green credentials of the school. With the support of senior colleagues and following careful consideration and consultation he championed the introduction of the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate, replacing Common Entrance. This was entirely for the benefit of the pupils rather than change for change's sake. Whether in the classroom, litter

picking, manning the eco shop, organising charitable sales or mentoring younger pupils, the boys have opportunities to think about what they are doing: who will benefit? Is it worthwhile? Could I have done it differently? Will I do it like this next time? By encouraging the boys to be reflective thinkers Robert is nurturing an invaluable life skill.

As a friend Robert is fun to be with. His entertaining anecdotes and witty comments are guaranteed to raise a smile when acting as host at dinner in College following Committee meetings. He is also well travelled and when he knew my husband and I were visiting Madeira he recommended we should take a boat excursion to see pilot whales and dolphins. Needless to say it was the highlight of our trip. Robert makes the most of school holidays as I suspect it is often the time for his creative thinking and to indulge his love of reading. I think of Robert as ‘a man of words’, able to find the right words for any occasion. Through his collaborative work with Matt Jenkinson on their book *How Poems Work*, as well as directing the annual school play together, the boys have witnessed two masters of their craft at work.

It is no surprise to me that after relinquishing the Headship Robert will move his attention to developing a bursary fund for the school. He has long wanted to address the problem of the lack of affordability of school fees, which faces so many parents keen to access independent education. His persuasive powers and ability to network will come into their own as he seeks to find generous donors. His organisational skills and attention to detail will also be invaluable in his dual role as project manager of the pending building

works. The new development will be the exciting culmination of Robert's vision for New College School. Without doubt Robert has been an exceptional Headmaster.

21

“A single project ... educational excellence”

Edward Higginbottom

Let me first set the scene before welcoming the lead role.

When is a prep school not a prep school? Answer: when it's a choir school. What difference does that make? Longer answer: in New College School, 24 of the 160 pupils have needs extending beyond what normally pass as special. These are the 24 choristers, active and probationary. Their timetable has a very different shape, not so much during the school day itself (as understood by the majority) as after it. At 4pm, as many of the boys head to their afternoon activities and/or home, the choristers have yet to perform the duties that define the purpose and very existence of the school. They don't do that for another two hours. And then, as their fellow students settle down to tea and toast and the six o'clock news, they process into chapel to sing evensong. Supper time for them will be nearer 7.30.

Prep school? Choir school? There is certainly a distinction to be made concerning the timetable. And we must remember that the choristers' evening duties are much more than an after-school activity; they are

the paramount and indispensable duties of the school day. Yet they concern only a minority of the school's pupils. And herein lies not only a distinction but also a difficulty touching on the school's identity, a difficulty that is however negotiable through emphasizing mutual dependency. The latter might be framed thus: the non-choristers, the majority, make the school viable; the choristers provide its *raison d'être*. Without them it wouldn't exist; without the larger academic community it wouldn't work.

It's a delicate business getting the running of such a school 'right'. The interests of the two constituencies – chorister, non-chorister – have to be kept in balance. But not through a tally of accommodations made. Rather through the finding of common interests and the celebration of particularities. Each constituency needs to be enriched by the other without feeling discomforted by difference. And there is more than simply the matter of the daily schedule. Another concerns expectations. Choristers, who are no less bright than their non-singing colleagues (in some years 50% of choristers go on to Oxbridge), can't pack in the homework like others. Their schooling will be 'slower burn'. Not a reason for annoyance and frustration, but for understanding and patience. That said, the really outstanding among them are capable of securing not only music but academic awards to their next school.

Another difference will be the times when the choristers have to be absent from class to respond to their obligations to the Choir: they are part of a larger vocal ensemble that has its imperatives. For instance, concert tours and recordings are not optional add-ons but crucial undertakings defining the musical nature

and cultural interests of New College. What classroom teacher is going to clap his hands with joy learning that some of his class will be absent for two or three days, not through illness but because of some competing activity? How can we make the classroom teacher feel pleased that the choristers are about their 'disruptive' singing duties?

A third difference is to be found in the content and quality of the activity falling between the hours of 6 and 7pm. The choristers are transformed into liturgical artists, performing some of the greatest Western European music ever written, to a standard that regularly amazes the adults who hear it, on occasion outgunning professional adult singers. That's after a full day at school. Who is listening? Do their colleagues in the classroom know what they are up to? Who in the staffroom has clocked this part of their day? Who in school the next day will say, gosh, that was a fantastic anthem you sang last night?

Enter, stage right, Robert Gullifer.

A head of school needs to be smart; and good at lots of things. Let's take that as read. What I wish to record and celebrate here are the aspects of Robert's contribution to NCS that have allowed him to cultivate an environment - otherwise tending towards divergence and separation - allowing New College choristers to thrive.

First he has fully understood the dependency of the School on the College. The dependency has financial, real estate and governance implications. Some heads might try to assert their independence. Robert rather

sought further integration, building on mutual interests, making the School's association with the College a USP, and a bulwark against shrill voices. Of course, the College's bottom line is that the School is there to provide for its choristers. But Robert has seen to it that the College's ownership of the project has been converted into pride in the achievements of the school as a whole. That takes some doing, since New College's governing body is not alone in having a view on private schooling.

By building bridges (the regular use of the College amenities is but one concrete example), Robert has created a single project, that for want of a better term I'll call educational excellence. College dons, school parents, boys and staff are all happily part of this project. Within the SCR, it's impossible to refer to excellence in study and learning without heads nodding in wise assent. Clearly a good thing, even if you do have to pay for it (as undergraduates have now to pay for it). The indissoluble relationship between School and College is not a given, but has become one.

The choristers' work lies of course within the framework of Christian worship. The ethos of NCS is broadly Christian and there is no dissonance here. That said, the majority of School parents are not practising Christians, wearing the Christian ethos more as a cultural badge than as a sign of faith. Holding firm to faith issues in such a context is no easy matter. Here Robert skillfully negotiates between live faith events and enquiry. What can be said about a NCS boy is that he leaves the School well informed as to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and sympathetic to its broad

social aims and moral judgments. In a pluralistic society, this is no easy stretch of water to navigate.

What about other assets? Robert is not only a practising Christian but also a practising bass, who has been known to spend a week or so every year singing evensong in one of our provincial cathedrals. In some people's eyes this raises eccentricity to a new and special level. In my opinion it puts Robert in the perfect place for appreciating what the choristers do. He loves the liturgical repertory, knows what it takes to perform it, and can distinguish between the competent and the inspired in its rendition.

This builds more than simply an empathetic response. It's one thing to say 'well done' having little clue as to what was 'well', or even 'done'. It's another thing to inhabit the same cultural and musical world. In Robert, we have a head able to critique the choristers' work from the inside, and a head who follows the choristers with discernment to the end of their working day. Also a head who knows to curb his ambition to be singing himself in the Choir! Distance is a necessary ingredient of Authority.

And authority is the *sine qua non*. I recall its being tested to the full when we were both in our bathing togs in the Mediterranean Sea. The Choir had a couple of September gigs on the Côte d'Azur. And here we were in Antibes, allowing the choristers a well-merited *entr'acte* on the beach. Neptune-like, we both stood guard in the deeper water chasing the more intrepid (less conforming) boys back towards shallower regions (it was always a sign of a successful tour to bring back as many boys as we took out).

Being actively responsible for the wider educational welfare of the choristers is part of the brief. On the same trip we visited the Picasso Museum. I could only but marvel at the ability of the boys to deconstruct cubist canvases. And here Robert was completely at one with me: this experience – Picasso, the beach, testing French in the open-air market, acclimatizing to French cuisine, and bringing a real joy to a French audience through excellence in performance – was well worth a missed Geography lesson or even Latin class – or two.

These are the occasions when one gets closest to the choristers' broader educational needs, not to mention their accomplishments; and the occasions when the intelligent and sensitive management of their time and energies could not be more telling, including the all-important siesta and 'après concert' moments when children are NOT going to fall asleep immediately. Robert got this completely.

The stories of dysfunctional relations between organists and Headmasters are legion. Indeed, within the profession such dysfunctionality was often regarded as an industry standard. We organists were expected to fight the school head. The choristers were a subset under the cosh, completely misunderstood by the school, and in need of vigorous protection. This had its special dynamic. For the choristers it was less fun. They are better served by harmony, and this I enjoyed all the way to the perfect cadence (perhaps plagal) in the company of Robert Gullifer.

My conclusion is not so much that we achieved thereby better music-making in the chapel, but rather that such regimes are happy, sane and reasonable, and indeed sustainable. In addition, they make chorister recruitment a more successful proposition. If this is a personal tribute to Robert's time as Head of NCS, it is also an explanation of how he ran a *choir* school, not a prep department. We are the richer for it.



22

“Exactly the person one
would want as a Headmaster”

William Whyte

Imagine a North Oxford dinner party. No, I know you don't want to; no one ever does. But try and imagine it all the same. Picture the dark and chilly room, the Ottolenghi-inspired menu, the wine brought back from that wonderful trip to Puglia or Puerto Rico. Now conjure up the conversation: property prices, the train to Marylebone, that marvellous patisserie in Summertown; you know the sort of thing.

Then, of course, the discussion turns to education. It was bound to - and so everyone steels themselves for the inevitable questions about schools. The room grows colder still and the pomegranate molasses congeals on untouched plates as all the diners sit in judgement on each other. There is seemingly no right answer to the enquiry 'And where do your children go to school?' Every response is wrong, and many responses are likely to provoke outrage. Even a firm denial - of children, of their need to be educated, of their attendance at any form of educational establishment - can trigger contempt or something worse. An ordinarily dreadful evening has just been elevated, becoming memorably catastrophic.

Until, that is, someone mentions Robert Gullifer. I know – and I know because it has happened to me. Only a matter of months ago, I was trapped in the corner of a grand North Oxford house by a grand North Oxford lady who demanded to know where my sons were educated. Unable to escape, I stammered a few words about choirs and choristers and New College School. ‘Oh, Robert Gullifer,’ she unexpectedly beamed. ‘He’s exactly the person one would want as a Headmaster; exactly the person one wishes one had had as one’s Headmaster in fact.’ Somehow, it seemed, I had passed the test – or, at any rate, Robert had.

It seems strange to say that someone was born to be a Headmaster. Indeed, it can hardly be right to claim that such a career was foreordained, even destined. Nor would it be correct to imply that Robert could only have ever been a Headmaster. He was – and is – eminently qualified to do almost anything that requires intelligence, charm, thoughtfulness, empathy, and a capacity for hard work. One can well imagine him running a large firm, a populous parish, a sophisticated magazine, even a smart regiment – provided it did not involve too much shouting, running, or mud. A student of English and a choral scholar, he even had a brief foray into historical research: a fact recalled in his article of 1982, ‘Opposition to the 1902 Education Act’, which continues to be cited in learned publications to this day.

Yet it, in truth, is hard to conceive of Robert as anything other than an outstanding Headmaster. Whether presiding over sports day in an immaculately

pressed cream suit or remembering the names of every boy as he doles out awards in chapel each week, he is never less than impressive. He can be tough; anyone who has ever seen him expel an over-zealous traffic warden from Savile Road would testify to that. He also sets exacting standards, and evidently expects them to be met. His own sense of duty is seemingly implacable: witness, for instance, his invariable appearance at New College chapel, which he attends far more frequently than anyone else – even those you might expect to see there more often.

But he also has a lightness to him and a willingness to laugh at himself. Various wrapped in toilet paper at the Pre-Prep party, or joking with parents at the summer fete, he is never pompous or standoffish, but always attentive and – most of all – kind.

The quality of the man is best shown in the happy school he has created and the confident, caring, and able boys he has educated. It can be found, too, in the Headmaster's letters he has dutifully produced each Friday in term. Often seen by parents as merely the vehicles for an occasional image of their cherished offspring, these letters contain an ethos and give clues to what he has sought to achieve at New College School. They show him reading widely and reflecting seriously on what NCS should be, what it should do, how it should serve each boy, and how each boy should be equipped to serve the wider community.

Over recent years he has drawn on the words of figures as diverse as Michel de Montaigne and William Carlos Williams, Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Yukichi Fukuzama, Robert Kennedy and Thomas Ken. He has

written about character, charity, imagination, language learning, the importance of building snowmen, and much more besides. These letters are not just an opportunity to share his enviably broad range of reference, and they are not only evidence of how much time and energy he gives to thinking about the School. Above all, they reveal why he is such a successful Headmaster. Thoughtful, measured, clear-headed and clearly expressed, Robert's weekly letters speak of his constant attempts to improve NCS and his ability to convey this vision to those around them.

None of this can be faked. Although produced each week over many years, when read together the letters form a coherent whole. And one particular letter gives us a sense of why this might be so. For Robert also seems to know that he has found his calling: that in some senses he is perfectly fitted to be a Headmaster. Reflecting on a hero - the Whig divine and brilliant humourist Sydney Smith - he quotes this piece of wisdom:

It is a very wise rule in the conduct of the understanding, to acquire early a correct notion of your own peculiar constitution of mind, and to become well acquainted, as a physician would say, with your idiosyncrasy. Are you an acute man, and see sharply for small distances? Or are you a comprehensive man, and able to take in, wide and extensive views into your mind?

Does your mind turn its ideas into wit? Or are you apt to take a common-sense view of the objects presented to you? Have you an exuberant imagination, or a correct judgment? Are you quick, or slow? Accurate,

or hasty? A great reader, or a great thinker? It is a prodigious point gained if any man can find out where his powers lie, and what are his deficiencies.

This is surely what Robert did as he contemplated his future and considered his own character. He considered it accurately, he chose well, and we have all been the beneficiaries of that.

About the same time, he also made a truly excellent decision: he married Louise. She has been such a central part of the School that it is critical I acknowledge it here. Almost as assiduous an attender at Chapel as Robert, she is also a familiar sight at fetes and parties and hosting the leavers' dinner. Somehow – goodness knows how – she combines all this with a stellar academic career as a college tutor, legal scholar, honorary QC, and now Rouse Ball Chair of English Law at the University of Cambridge. Robert would not be the same without her; nor would the School. Together, they have made something extraordinary here.

So imagine drinks at the Headmaster's flat after Friday evensong. Picture the light and airy room, the Mini-Cheddars artfully arranged upon a plate, the sound of wine bottles and elderflower pressé being opened. Now conjure up the conversation: property prices, the train to Marylebone, that difficult – perhaps impossible – note in the Nunc Dimittis. At the heart of it all are both the Gullifers: Louise with news of her travels and Robert telling improbable stories of his mother's tennis matches with Haile Selassie. Jokes are told, anxious parents counselled, scholarships celebrated, and exhausted choristers given fizzy drinks.

It's a civilized scene - and a welcoming one. We shall miss his wisdom, his warmth and his welcome enormously. We shall miss him. We shall miss them both.

23

“Fairness and consideration”

Brett Morrison

I recall clearly two segments of the conversation Robert had with me at my interview for a teaching position at New College School. The first was Robert mentioning that he had recently taken out a gym membership, though his tracksuit remained hanging in the wardrobe. I think it was the idea that someone might actually hang up a tracksuit that stood out. The second point stood out for a more poignant reason. He said 'we don't raise our voice at students at New College', conveying in a few words the core values and care that epitomise the school of which I would come to be a part.

Robert doesn't have to raise his voice to convey his message, he is the master of the cocked eyebrow and can quietly make a powerful point with a well-chosen facial expression. The fairness and consideration he affords to the boys and staff at New College is second to none, and he leads by example to make this school a genuinely special place to work. 'Nurturing' is a word often thrown around at small schools just because of their size.

However, at NCS, thanks to the tone Robert has set, this is more than a buzzword; it's the actual ethos of the school and can be seen on a daily basis. I have learnt so much from having Robert as a boss (including all the correct uses of the semi colon and several niche Latin hymns). His approachable and reassuring presence will be missed, as will his inspiring and capable leadership of the school. I wish him the happiest of retirements. Who knows, maybe that tracksuit will finally make it out of the wardrobe!

24

“Integrity and Virtue”

Jane West

A parody of ‘If’ by Rudyard Kipling

Robert. You have kept your head, when all about you
 Were losing theirs and not knowing what to do.
You trusted yourself and none would ever have doubted
you,
 But you made allowance for their questions too;
You have been leading and not been tired of teaching.
 You have not talked about, nor dealt in lies,
Nor your love never gave way to hating,
 And you are great and your ways always wise:

You have dreamt and yet not made dreams your master;
 You have thought deeply, yet not made foolish thoughts
your aim;
You meet Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same:
You listen, hear and believe the truth you’ve spoken
 Never twisted to make traps for fools,
Nor watched the things you gave life to, broken,
 Yet would stoop to build them up with caring tools:

You enriched lives of pupils with all your winnings
And risked on some who would pitch or toss
Until Year 8, and then again with Reception beginnings.
And never breathed a sad word about this loss:
You have forced your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn, long after they have onward gone,
And held on when there was nothing in you
Except the Will which said "Headmaster. Go on!"

You have talked to crowds, with integrity and virtue,
And dined with Dons-but not lost the common touch,
Boys, parents, staff nor loving friends would ever seek to
hurt you,
All sing and count with you, and value you much;
You have filled each unforgiving minute,
With sixty seconds' worth of teaching, learning and fun,
NCS is yours and everything in it,
And - what is more - first-rate Headmaster - *Very Well
Done!*

25

“Hearts and hands and voices”

Robert Quinney

Walk past New College Chapel just after 10 on any Wednesday morning during school term, and you will hear a sound at once redolent of times past and – youthful, vigorous – totally of the present. The boys of New College School are singing a hymn. They do so not only on Wednesdays in their chapel services, but daily in the more private arena of morning assembly. I have played for enough chapel services to know that not the least enthusiastic singer of the hymns is the Headmaster himself: and on another occasion, I accompanied Hymn Practice in the school hall.

This was not the Molesworthian scene I’d witnessed elsewhere: some poor teacher, quailing before the barely suppressed hostility, or hilarity, or both, of an unwilling schoolboy *melée*, forlornly exhorting his charges (it’s always a he, and always a hapless one) to sing better in time or tune, or with greater *commitment*. Far from it: at the Headmaster’s command the massed voices – not only the choristers, for this is a school where every pupil sings in at least one ensemble – rose enthusiastically, and with remarkable unanimity, inspired by their leader.

Lieder. What we call a ‘chorale’ was more commonly referred to by those Lutherans who, right from the start, made hymn-singing the mainstay of their public and private devotion, as a *Lied*: a song. Since the nineteenth century, ‘song’ has generally been taken to mean a musical exposition of individual feeling, heart on sleeve, often with ‘romantic’ content. These songs of tormented passion – think Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* or Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* – are, arguably, the quintessential works of the period that we classify with that very word: Romantic. Such histrionics are not for the sober liturgies of the Church, surely?

In the Lutheran tradition, and especially in the Pietist strain that flourished in the lifetime of Johann Sebastian Bach, communal hymn-singing could indeed express deep emotion, often in overtly dramatic terms. These were not rehearsals of doctrine only, but also personal statements of faith, and its obverse, doubt; of confidence and fearfulness and hope, and of what lies between them. (The German word for that precious commodity is *Trost*, and there is no exact English equivalent; ‘consolation’ is probably closest, but without the associations of ‘consolation prize’ or wooden spoon, for *Trost* is God’s greatest gift to the faithful on earth.) When the subject matter was grim, so was the language. Here is Luther in 1523:

*Dem Teufel ich gefangen lag
Im Tod war ich verloren,
Mein Sünd mich quälet Nacht und Tag,
Darinn ich war geboren;
Ich fiel auch immer tiefer d’rein,
Es war kein guts am Leben mein,
Die Sünd hat mich besessen.*

Truly a dark night of the soul. Richard Massie's translation of 1854 connects the original with the more familiar world of Anglican hymnody:

*Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,
Death brooded darkly o'er me;
Sin was my torment night and day,
Therein my mother bore me;
Deeper and deeper still I fell;
Life was become a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me.*

Massie, son of a Cheshire clergyman, makes his agenda clear in the preface to his translations of *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs*: 'I would fain hope that even in the imperfect dress which I have been able to give them, hymns which for more than three hundred years have been sung with enthusiasm by the German people...even in the field and cottage, may touch a responsive chord in the hearts of their Anglo-Saxon brethren, and tend in some small degree to uphold the great doctrines, *which it has been too common for men in our day to vilify and decry.*'

For Massie, Luther's hymns were a stronghold against the insidious spread of Popery, lately legitimised and worse, infecting the Church of England: the Catholic hierarchy had been re-established in England and Wales in 1850, and influence of the formerly outlawed Church was spreading, via the Oxford Movement, around the Church of England. With it came a revival of interest in the ancient hymns proper to the *Liturgia horarum* (the Benedictine cycle of daily 'offices' such as Matins, Vespers and Compline), and in plainchant more generally: translations of office hymns came widely into use, with fifteen included in *Hymns*

Ancient and Modern of 1861, and over thirty in Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The English Hymnal* of 1906, their associated plainchant melodies notated in neumes on four-line staves. The English-language *Manual of Plainsong*, first produced by H. B. Briggs and W. H. Frere in 1902, which sets the whole Coverdale (BCP) psalter among other items, is still in widespread use today.

A&M and its successors also incorporated many hymns from the dissenting traditions: Wesleyans (principally Charles Wesley himself), Presbyterians and other 'non-conformists' in whose worship hymn-singing was second only to the sermon as a means of galvanising and edifying the community. And the new hymnals further expanded the repertory with brand new work by writers such as Robert Bridges (a prolific translator from Latin, Greek and German as well as a poet—Poet Laureate, indeed) and composers including Parry, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, and, later on, Howells. In our own day, in spite of the deterioration of musical standards (I mean not of the performance, but of the music being performed) that has attended attempts to make the Church more 'accessible' and 'relevant' (to whom? and who gets to judge according to these criteria, and how do they measure success?), excellent new hymns continue to be written and composed.

Anyone seeking an education in the history of the Christian faith, its doctrines and its liturgies could do much worse than to take a critical look at a twentieth century hymnal; and there are few communities so well versed in the singing of hymns as the boys of New College School. There is thus a clear educational value

in the practice. Is that the only reason? Well, no reasonable Head would nowadays insist on the singing of hymns as a means of indoctrinating their charges into a narrow, prescriptive set of beliefs, whatever their own position on spiritual matters. But they might take the view that communal singing is a very good thing, and that there is no better repertory of easily-assimilated, memorable, varied, satisfying pieces of music – shall we call them accessible? – than may be found in a decent hymn book.

But I think there is quite clearly something not entirely rational about it as well. Robert Gullifer's hymn singing is by no means an official posture, nor is it something as dry as a policy. Watch (and hear – you can definitely hear) him sing a hymn, and you have every bit as much of the true Gullifer as may be encountered after hours, when his chinos are turned up and the ice is clinking in the Campari. Here is an authenticity that we appreciate instinctively. That, and the value of all these hymns, these *Lieder*, to generations of pupils, is something worth celebrating – with gratitude, applause, and acclamation. In other words, and to quote Martin Rinckart in Catherine Winkworth's translation, *With hearts and hands and voices*.

26

“Kind, caring, patient, thoughtful,
committed, indulgent”

Matt Jenkinson

I first encountered Robert Gullifer and New College School through an extraordinary stroke of luck - one to which I frequently think back and shudder, considering what might have happened in an alternative ‘sliding doors’ reality. Robert was in need of an English and History teacher and had begun some of the more informal methods of getting the word out - he asked his neighbour over the fence. Said neighbour happened to be an English don, who put the feelers out around her graduate students. They weren’t interested. ‘But Matt Jenkinson might be’, piped up one. Robert emailed me and set up a preliminary meeting at Harris Manchester, in Louise’s study. I lived in 9 Holywell Street at the time, and thought a thirty-second walk would be fine - I would just find out what the deal was, what a prep school was, that kind of thing. At the time I was toying with a career in teaching, in law, or in management consultancy. The first of these options was my natural home, the second provoked in me a kind of mental paralysis, while the third seemed well remunerated but perhaps a bit too much maths for my humanities-addled mind.

Thank goodness I did go to that meeting in Harris Manchester. Robert used his characteristically disarming friendliness to pre-interview me, explain what Common Entrance was (more on that anon), and offer me a real interview. 'If the interview goes well, but then you don't like the job, leave after a year - no hard feelings', he said. 'If you do like it, stay a bit longer'. Eleven years later, I have worked with Robert as his Head of English and History, Director of Studies, Deputy Head Academic, Chorister Tutor, and finally as his successor as Headmaster. And what an inheritance he is leaving me.

I am bound to endorse Robert's views on education, and on life more generally, as we are remarkably likeminded. Or, perhaps more pertinently, Robert has been remarkably indulgent of my ideas - first as a gobby little upstart (me, I should clarify), latterly as a rather more patient and discerning promoter of worthwhile change. I suspect that Robert came to dread the moments when I entered his study announcing 'I've had an idea!', because they - more often than not - involved wholesale reform and rather a lot of money. But Robert's own judiciousness and desire to make New College School the best it could possibly be ensured that the duff ideas were scrapped and the better ones were supported wholeheartedly.

Indeed, it is this approach to change that Robert has had in common with his more eminent predecessors. It is easy to look at somewhere like NCS - founded in 1379 and all that - and assume it is fusty, backward-looking, traditional in the worst sense. But beneath that veneer, the best NCS heads have always stayed one step ahead of worthwhile educational trends, and they

have used the school's independence to focus on what is best for its pupils without too many external encumbrances. The most dramatic change, curriculum-wise, during Robert's tenure must have been the school's move away from Common Entrance and towards the Pre-Senior Baccalaureate. CE began in 1903 or thereabouts; I'm not sure when NCS began using it, but I suspect the school's departure from it marked the most profound curriculum change in the school's history in the last century. Robert had the vision and bravery to endorse this change, to negotiate with senior school heads, and to help convince parents and boys that such a change was fundamentally beneficial – to the boys most especially.

Why was it beneficial? Partly because it encouraged us as a community to think about desirable learning habits, the skills that underlie everything else we do. Partly because it took some of the unnecessary pressure off thirteen-year-olds in their last summer of prep school. But mainly because it afforded us the freedom to innovate the curriculum, using the in-house talent that Robert has attracted to the school. As the technological world whizzed past the point that Robert mostly lost interest, for example, he still embraced that whizziness because he could see it would ultimately benefit others – the littler others around us.

You see, fundamentally Robert has always seen that education is about pupils. That might sound like a blindingly obvious statement to make, but it is not a view that has always been shared (and sometimes it still isn't shared) in schools. Robert's treasury of school stories is littered with those of teachers retiring to the staffroom bar at lunch; crusty staffroom 'drainers'

remonstrating because a new teacher had taken someone else's chair; or teachers brazenly promoting their own gimmicks while ignoring the little charges in front of them. While this clearly amused Robert, it also horrified him - because none of those things had anything to do with the pupils. He has always taken the 100%-correct view that teachers' egos and sense of entitlement, when they have grown or occurred among the minority, should be sublimated to the interests of the pupils.

He has wanted those pupils to have the best - and broadest - possible education. There are few, if any, other heads who will publicly digress to nine-year-olds about hymnody. When picking our brains about which texts to teach, or plays to produce, Robert's mind always went to the demanding. *The Go-Between* in Year 7? Difficult, yes, but doable and so, so worthwhile. *Murder in the Cathedral* in New College chapel? Why not? A series of Shakespeare adaptations with the original text delivered by twelve- and thirteen-year-olds? Absolutely! Shall we co-write a rather unmodish book that puts poetry in chronological order and then talks about its meanings and techniques with absolutely no mention of literary theory? When shall we start?! It has been through this rich and cultured focus that Robert has kept in touch with the boys when other heads might have felt more comfortable sitting in their studies filleting the latest directives from the inspectorate.

And, of course, it has also been through music. Robert's leading of hymns for the past eleven years has been astonishing. The confidence the boys have derived from Robert's own has been palpable, and

even the shrinkiest of wallflowers has intoned more forcefully in the full knowledge that the Headmaster will cover them. This has been especially helpful on those days when Robert's more obscure hymn choices have fallen through the cracks of hymn practice, and most congregants have mumbled, bemused, through a non-classic. Over in chapel, Robert and Louise have been key members of the New College congregation – not just because the office required them to be so, but because they really thought it was (and still think it is) important. And, not to be outdone by the boys zooming through their lower grades, Robert took on the double bass from scratch (no pun intended) in part to pursue his own interest in the instrument and in part, I suspect, to remind himself (and us) that we are always learning and sometimes it's really, really hard.

Those are some of things that Robert has done. But what has he *been*? Robert's characteristic unflappability was demonstrated on one occasion when a mischievous prank was played on him by, well, me. We had sourced a six-foot mannequin to use as a prop in *Henry IV, Part 1* – to represent Hotspur's dead body. We had even put a Kenneth Branagh mask on him to showcase NCS's theatrical credentials. Once the production was over, though, we were left with a six-foot Branagh and not much storage space in which to put him. For the next few days and weeks, therefore, 'Ken' would turn up on colleagues' chairs ready to give them a little frisson when they turned their lights on in the morning. When it came to be Robert's turn, I put 'Ken' on the sofa in his study and wandered away, not realising that Robert was about to meet and give a tour to a prospective pupil and his family. It was too late to dash back in to requisition

'Ken', so I just had to watch open-mouthed (did I see my career flash before my eyes?) as Robert walked in with the family and calmly relocated the random mannequin as if it were the most natural thing in the world to encounter a six-foot Ken Branagh perched on one's furniture.

Let's finish by fast-forwarding a few years to that very study, to Robert's final few months as Headmaster of New College School. To expedite the distribution of awards in chapel, and to allow the HM to speak to the boys about their work in more detail, it was decided that the boys' accomplishments would be read out publicly in College, but the boys would then receive their certificates the following lunchtime in the Head's study.

This was envisaged as a fairly quick affair, with a line of boys trailing outside ready to shake Robert's hand, exchange a few pleasantries, then move on to play table football outside. On the first occasion that this new 'Headmaster's Presentation' occurred, though, Robert warmly beckoned all of the boys into his study, sat them on his assortment of chairs, and beamed as he spoke gently, kindly, enthusiastically to each one of them about their achievements. It was one of those misty-eyed Mr Chips moments, sure - but a salutary reminder that we need more of those misty-eyed Mr Chips moments in education, and in life more generally.

Robert has been kind, caring, patient, thoughtful, committed, indulgent - all qualities and characteristics that have recurred throughout the tributes in this book. And these are not tributes from the arm-twisted or the

duty-bound. They are from Robert's colleagues, pupils, contemporaries, friends who all value what Robert has *been* - and *is* - as much as what he has *done*.

