



Robert West (BGS 1971 to 2014)

Robert West first came to Bradford Grammar School (BGS) in 1971, straight from his PGCE at the University of Bristol. He was appointed by Kenneth Robinson to a large and flourishing Classics Department. Before Bristol, Robert had been educated at Dulwich College, one of seven Surrey County scholars awarded places at the school on the strength of their 11+ performance. Inspired by some outstanding Classics masters, including Philip Vellacott and OB Geoff Tomlinson, Robert settled on Classics as his specialism in the Sixth Form, although he was a gifted mathematician who could readily have chosen that road instead. The Head of Dulwich at this time who wrote Robert's reference for BGS was another Old Bradfordian (OB), Ronald Groves.

Dulwich was followed by four years at Trinity College Oxford, where Robert arrived in 1966 on a major scholarship to read 'Literae Humaniores'. With characteristic modesty, he claimed that his time at Oxford was "undistinguished", but the self-evident depth and richness of his classical knowledge belied this. He kept in touch with his college over the years, and more than one of his pupils at Bradford went on to read Classics there inspired by his fondness for the place. For the last 15 years or so of his life, he spent three or four weeks every summer in Oxford, enjoying being once again among the dreaming spires.

Arriving at Bradford Grammar School in 1971, Robert embarked upon his many years of service to the School, teaching Latin and Greek to the full range of age groups, with Ancient History and latterly Classical Civilisation A Level at times. In the last few years of his career the department made the most of his particular excellence at teaching Latin and Greek Prose Composition, and his expertise in the study of Cicero, but he was supremely versatile, ready to teach anything he was asked, from Euripides' tragedies to the annals of Tacitus, though he did draw the line at Xenophon!

His rich classical knowledge was the bedrock of the department, and whenever his colleagues were stuck on a point of history or a question of syntax, or were asked to source an obscure classical reference or to come up with an elegant Latin motto, they invariably turned to Robert. A scholarly and effective teacher, he could be relied upon to explain points of grammar, questions of style, concepts and ideas with characteristic clarity, authority and precision.

After 18 years under Bernard Slater as Head of Department, Robert took over in 1989. This was a challenging time for a new Head of Department, with all three of his colleagues being new appointments. Steering his department with characteristic care, tact and sensitivity, he settled Tim Bateson, Ian Bentley and Jane Chapman into their new roles admirably.

Robert's 41 years at BGS were important ones for the Classics Department. The 70s, 80s and 90s were not easy times for Classics teaching in schools all over the country, with competition from new subjects arriving on the curriculum, pupil numbers falling and departments in many schools dwindling or being axed. Throughout these years, quietly, eloquently and effectively, Robert fought his corner, and the good health of Classics at BGS today would not have been possible without his 17 years in charge of the department.

In Classics circles beyond BGS, Robert was well known and much respected. He spent a sabbatical term at Selwyn College Cambridge in 1996 working on a commentary on Cicero's 'Pro Milone', which he finally published in 2006, and gave talks on this speech at various venues up and down the country, Eton among them; in 2016, Robert produced an updated version of this text for Bloomsbury.

For more than 25 years, he attended the Association for Latin Teaching summer schools and after nine years as their Treasurer was made a Vice-President in 2009. Robert also had a long career as an examiner for what became OCR (first as Chief Examiner for GCSE Latin, setting the very first GCSE Latin papers, then as Principal Examiner for GCSE Greek Literature for a decade, and Reviser for Classics papers at GCSE and A Level for the best part of two decades.

A First Year Form Tutor under Derek Butler from 1973 to 1987, Robert later became a Sixth Form tutor, much valued by his pupils for his guidance and support in those important years, not least his advice about choosing a degree course and applying to university. His reference writing was second to none, and he had a talent for capturing the essential qualities of a pupil and presenting them in lucid, elegant prose. Five years as Assistant Higher Education Adviser (2006 to 2011) gave him the chance to use these skills to great effect, turning into silk purses the sow's ears provided by less gifted colleagues.

Robert contributed widely to school life over the years, singing in the bass section in school choral groups (he had a fine voice) and supporting musical life generally; he served as a Combined Cadet Force (CCF) officer between 1972 and 1984, mainly in the RAF section, and helped with the school Scouts, especially at their Summer Camps. For a number of years he was treasurer for the Drama Society, and in the latter part of his career was a timekeeper at swimming races. Teaching and non-teaching colleagues increasingly called upon his skills as a proof-reader as he was a perfectionist whose keen eye for detail and thoroughness meant that any task undertaken would always be performed to the highest standard. A Head Boy towards the end of his career, whom Robert had painstakingly coached in his reading of the List of Benefactors for Founders Day at the Cathedral, referred to him in a piece written for 'The Bradfordian' (2009) as the "marvellous and meticulous Mr West", which – as epithets go – is not so wide of the mark.

Although Robert retired from BGS in August 2012, he was coaxed back into the classroom in September 2013, when he returned to teach Sixth Form Classicists one day a week; Robert finally hung up his gown in August 2014. In retirement, he enjoyed attending organ recitals, especially at Bradford Cathedral and Leeds Town Hall, and concerts up and down the country, particularly those featuring his beloved Elgar. He attended Wakefield Cathedral regularly and Bradford Cathedral occasionally, and he maintained his keen interest in cathedral music, acting as a chaperone during the boys' choir practices at Bradford Cathedral for several years. Robert had a razor-sharp mind to the end and he could polish off the Times crossword in twenty minutes and the killer Sudoku often in less. Robert remained a firm supporter of BGS in his final years, often returning to the School to support its musicians; he kept in touch with a number of former colleagues and was always eager to hear of the school's fortunes and of the successes of its pupils and staff.

A man of "refined learning" (*eruditio politior*), known for "good taste in his choice of words" (*sermonis elegantia*), who had a "clear, gentle and melodious speaking voice" (*vox liquida, suavis et canora*) and "unravelling problems in the poets and orators with clarity and elegance" (*lucide explicuit et lepide*) and was a teacher whose pupils "held him in affection, and the teacher likewise his pupils" (*discipuli magistrum charum habuere, magister discipulos*) These phrases belong to the inscription on the memorial to Thomas Clapham, in a church in Bethmesley, Craven. Clapham died in 1719, aged 49, having been Headmaster of BGS for 20 years, and features in the list of benefactors recited at the cathedral each Founders Day (his coat of arms now graces the Learning Link in an illuminated stained glass window). The warmth of this tribute to a much loved and exceptional teacher is evident, and each one of these phrases could equally well be used of Robert West.