

Tribute for Dod Wainwright by Paul Spillane



It is a sunny day in early July 1972. Two cars have been dispatched to Eastbourne station. They are Peter John's Rover and Tony Sulman's Vauxhall – the two grandest cars at St Andrew's. Gleamingly polished, they are due to collect the guest of honour, the Minister for Education, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, who is coming to open the Durlacher Gymnasium. And here is a photograph taken that day. On the left is Jack Durlacher, Old Androvian, successful city businessman, benefactor, chairman of the governors, and inspired risk taker. For it was Jack and Michael Richardson and other adventurous governors who did an extraordinary thing. They appointed a 28-year-old as the new Headmaster.

On the right is Dod, already with three years of headmasterly achievements behind him, looking impossibly young as he always did, quietly gratified at this great moment, and with that wonderfully characteristic expression which I love – of someone who has either just been amused by something or is expecting to be amused.

If it was a bold and brilliant risk to appoint as headmaster a young man who only 15 years earlier had been its head boy, it must have been a brave thing to accept the offer. The challenges were huge and we much admire the vision, skill and determination with which he met them. There were too few pupils, too little money, and a pattern of education which had stood still. But there were Old Androvians, some of them very influential, with an enduring affection for their old school – and there was Dod. This is what he wrote in 1970: "Our buildings, our teaching techniques, our living conditions must adapt to a changing world." This photograph was taken after Dod had been in office for only three years – but, thanks to the success of the Centenary Appeal, Mrs Thatcher opened not only the Durlacher gymnasium but also the art studios, the visual aids room and the boys' common room. The swimming pool soon followed, numbers almost doubled to 150, and so it went on – the arrival of the first girls, and the arrival of Ascham – for at a time when prep schools along the south coast were closing, St Andrew's was enjoying deserved prosperity.

Before the word holistic came into currency, Dod was developing a modern, all-round education. Notice the rooms that Mrs Thatcher opened – Dod wanted the pupils to explore their aptitudes and develop their skills across a full range of experience – art, drama, music, sport and so on. Sport of course, for Dod himself was a very fine sportsman, an unusually

talented cricketer, remembered from their schooldays by Chris Saunders, his opposite number as captain of cricket at Lancing, as a notably elegant batsman. But Dod realised that if the school was not a house of good learning it was nothing. The academic expectations and consequent standards rose spectacularly – the brightest won top scholarships to top schools: and they really did – in 1975 they won the four top scholarships to Harrow, and in 1983 the top scholarships at six different public schools were won; meanwhile the Common Entrance candidates earned their passports to the schools of their choice. It was an exciting time – managed intelligently and deftly. He reconciled respect for the traditions of the school with a need for it always to be up to date. Dod remembered, when he quoted Aristotle, to say not only that we stand on the shoulders of giants, but also that we peer from those shoulders over the wall of time always into the future.

If we admired these tremendous achievements, we also respected the way in which Dod went about his headmastership. It is a cliché, but nonetheless true, to say that the school was like one big happy family. What do I mean by this? Well, everyone was valued and it was entirely unfeudal: the first person all those returning went to see was Tony Smith the chef. Furthermore, there was a wide range of personalities and ages in the common room, from impatient young Turks to established old soldiers, and we all got on extraordinarily congenially. Of course, behind and beside every successful headmaster there is an insufficiently regarded headmaster's wife. Dod and Annie brought with them a young family – Mark, and Sarah who was born soon after their arrival, and not forgetting Copper, their erratic red setter. Annie's contribution to the team and to the school was immense. She was instrumental in bringing colour and homeliness into the boarders' lives, turning the dormitories into bedrooms and liaising with people such as Tony Smith to make the place as much of a home from home as possible. Earlier this week, John Dryden told me of his happy memories of Annie reading bedtime stories to the youngest boarders – an example of what Wordsworth called "little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love" – unremembered, perhaps, by the giver, but not by the grateful recipient.

As a staff, we were always very busy, but happily so, not least because Dod trusted us and gave us the freedom to express ourselves and to promote our enthusiasms: from sailing to shooting, from model railways to plays, from pottery to photography. He also gave the pupils – boys in those early days – the freedom, within limits, to express themselves, as Specials, as performers on many stages and in many arenas. There was a great sense of a common purpose, of everyone pulling on the same rope in the same direction.

Admired, respected and – which cannot be said of all headmasters – deeply loved. Why did we love Dod? First because he was kind, generous and always approachable. He communicated a passion for St Andrew's which we all came to share. Care was a watchword: he was always careful in his dealings and he cared profoundly for the well-being of the school and everyone in it. There was so much to be proud of, but Dod never sought the limelight and never sought personal praise. He had a lovely sense of humour and an acute sense of the wry, the ironic. He would be out of school tomorrow at a meeting – Oh, the Governors or IAPS, we presumed – or was the meeting perhaps at Lingfield, Goodwood or Sandown Park?

Before coming to St Andrew's as headmaster, Dod had proved himself as a leader, having been chosen as Captain of Cricket and Head Boy here and Captain of Cricket and Head of School at

the College. One tribute written about Dod describes him as charismatic. Yes, he was charismatic, but his was an unusual charisma, often undemonstrative, even diffident, but he was unswerving in his integrity and his adherence to strong principles and values. His was a Christian example of leadership as service. Eric Jones quotes a pupil's remark that "when Mr Wainwright speaks, you want to listen." I have searched my memory I cannot remember a single instance of him raising his voice.

I can recall only one episode when he got really angry – and that was justified. He and Annie would take prospective parents on tours of the school, and on the whole we did not let him down. There was, however, one really bad tour –and I remember the day quite vividly nearly fifty years on – when the classes he visited were not quite as expected: I was teaching in the library and for a perfectly good reason I was underneath the library table when the visitors arrived. Next door, the long schoolroom had been opened up for a forthcoming play, and Eric Sier was at the top of a stepladder fixing a lighting rig while his French lesson took place somewhat independently below. Further on, the visitors were greeted from a distance by the full force of John Dent's fury with his idle and inept Latinists. But as the visit went from bad to worse, Dod had an ace up his sleeve – to show them this beautiful Chapel. Into that classroom they came, which was empty as Michael Barry had a free period, and they approached the closed partition: no doorknob, no way in, just a wall. The temperamental doorknob having fallen off for the umpteenth time, Mike Barry had, in one of his "Oh for goodness' sake" moments, hurled it into a cupboard, so there it was, and there the tour abruptly stopped. Dod was very, very displeased.

Which brings us, with some difficulty thanks to Michael Barry, into this Chapel. For Dod, I think, as for ELB and for Philip Liddell, the Chapel was the heart of the school, and he found the gathering of the whole school and its worship here inexpressibly moving. Philip Liddell's memorial plaque bears a quotation from Wesley's anthem, "Lead me, Lord", which we are soon to hear, one of the best loved of all the anthems sung in this Chapel down the years. Above ELB's memorial on that wall hung a lamp bearing a Greek inscription which tells us to hold the torch, to share it and to pass it on to another. Dod was the right man at the right time. He rekindled the torch of St Andrew's and under his kind, wise and visionary leadership, it burned ever more brightly. He ushered in and nurtured what was truly a golden age. Which is, in both senses, why we are here today.