A TRIBUTE TO DON CULVER (Wellington School 1955-1993)

At Salisbury Cathedral on 17th February 2017.

I feel very honoured, as a former Headmaster of Wellington School, who had worked with Don, to be here today to celebrate this historian's life in the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As a copy of the Magna Carta lies within the precincts of this cathedral, so a part of Don's life, as a history master, will never leave the minds of several thousands of pupils who had the privilege to be taught by him at Wellington, to include my own children and other colleague's children.

In his final term at Oxford in June 1955, Don was invited for interview by Mr. Bankes-Williams, the then headmaster of Wellington School. He was subsequently appointed to teach history to Advanced level and with some O'level work as from that September. This was the beginning of his teaching career for the annual payment of no less than £619 from the sum of which £ 105 would be deducted annually for board and lodging! With a Diploma in Education under his belt and an Oxford degree the world was his oyster in those days. He joined Wellington School at the youthful age of 22 not only to teach his subject but to offer rugby and cricket as extra-curricular activities.

Additionally, Don was appointed as an assistant housemaster, first in the Junior Boarding house and shortly afterwards in the same capacity in Lights. As an Oxford man to join a light blue house must have stuck in his craw! Regardless, from 1958 to 1978, for some 20 years he continued in this post in looking after 70 boarders from the ages of 13 to 18 plus. This was while he was also Head of the History Department from 1963 – a busy life! Don specialised in British, Colonial, and American history as well as being a self-effacing expert in military and naval affairs. He relinquished the post as Head of History in 1982 as new syllabuses were introduced.

During his Housemaster days Don, not surprisingly, was Master i/c the Dining Room. This involved him in supervising the behaviour and table manners of all pupils. For many years he ran the under 15 Colts rugby and cricket teams and in his final years at school was the 1st XI cricket umpire yet hardly ever missing a Saturday afternoon's 1st XV rugby match. In I978, Don was elected to be the Honorary Membership Secretary of the Wellington Old Boys and Girls Association with his wealth of information about their present careers, accolades, and whereabouts. This considerable work - done in his own time - he continued until he retired. Today's Old Wellingtonian Association owes much to his sterling efforts.

Don was the very first member of the teaching staff who welcomed my family to Wellington in 1982, when I first arrived as the new Deputy Headmaster. Beyond the school, he became the staff representative of the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association, representing teaching staff at county, regional and national levels.

From the day I was appointed as Headmaster until Don's retirement in 1993, he was a valuable source of information on national teaching concerns conveyed from grass roots level. We frequently shared thoughts on the whims and quirks of new educational ideas and reforms that successive Ministers for Education proposed or even implemented. We even had a quiet bet as to how long each Minister for Education would last in office. Suffice to say, as an historian, Don nearly always won!

Don never missed a daily Chapel Service or Christmas Carol service, busily directing pupils and parents to their seats and providing a sense of decorum to all present. Before I entered each morning's service, having settled all in the Chapel, in his fatherly fashion, for they were his children, he would greet me on Chapel Steps with the words, 'Alan, what do you make of the news today about this or that?' Unlike Don, I had not read that day's paper at 8.30 am.

His knowledge of current events was second to none for he was in the Staff Common Room at 7.30 am each morning to devour many a

papers contents and clear up and wash and dry the used crockery left from the day before, usually left by boarding staff, as well as sorting out plates of biscuits for the staff coffee break!

Don was a great lover of food and one of the best tributes to him was recorded in the School Magazine in the year that he retired. This boarder Sixth Form student, to Don's delight, left to read History at university. He said, and I quote, 'I admired him for his great knowledge in History and current affairs, for getting the same seat in every school assembly and for managing to get so much food from the salad bar and keeping all of it on his plate'. Another younger girl pupil declared, 'Mr. Culver will be able to eat as many Mars Bar ice creams as he wants, now that he is retiring. He is an excellent teacher and will be sorely missed!'

Don was a benevolent yet firm teacher, exciting pupils with his lesson asides and, whatever their ability, always encouraging them to exceed their own expectations of themselves. His sense of fun in learning, his care for others – be they pupils, teachers, parents, and old pupils- certainly graced the teaching profession. Don was indeed a very wise owl who wrote most eloquently on all pupils' reports in the same way that he spoke and in such a elegant fashion. He was sorely missed when he retired. On his last Commemoration Day, at Wellington School, he quietly said to me, 'Alan, the time is right to move on!' He did not add: into Felicity's loving arms! Felicity, all of us here today salute a good friend and a man of the faith. May all of our memories of Don stay with us forever, as they will at Wellington School, to which he gave nearly half of his life. Don more than honoured the School motto – *Nisi Dominus Frustra* - If God be not with us, our labour is in vain. Don's labour was never in vain.

Here endeth the Second Chapter of Don Culver's life.