

A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. In a sense, as it were.

CHURCHILL's famous verdict on the Russia of WWII, and a quality of thoughtful reserve and reflection recognised by Ernest Rutter, one of his closest friends and colleagues, sum up Arthur well. However, these are later judgements.

EARLY YEARS (1958 -63)

I knew Arthur first when a 12-year old at Bedstone. He came straight from Oxford, via Cambridge and Christ's Hospital - all of which he had been able to attend, despite a modest background, as a result of winning various scholarships and grants.

When he arrived in 1958 he was almost certainly the first member of the academic staff who had not served in the forces during WWII and this, together with his youth, meant that he could engage the children in his care in a slightly more informal way than the rest.

In those days canes, detentions, 'runs' and other such (mis)behavioural deterrents, though commonplace, were by no means entirely conducive to creating a love of learning. This mattered, especially since he taught mediaeval British history, classics and languages - ancient and modern - by no means an 'easy sell' to the young sons of army, farmy folk; so classroom discipline was never his forte, then or later. However, he quickly found other ways of identifying with his students by becoming an effective participant in all aspects of school life including the many extra-curricular activities that were vitally important to his young charges.

Not a natural sportsman, he quickly learned to referee, organise, manage and score games and sports events; he played the piano and organ; he sang in the choir (he had a fine baritone singing/speaking/reading voice); he supported the many plays and other 'public' performances we children performed and he gradually extended these activities by exercising his exceptionally well-ordered mind in sponsoring hobbies and clubs and in the production of timetables, rotas, lists and schedules of almost every kind (even car number plates, and this in the days before 'big data'), for which his colleagues were doubtless also very grateful.

His greatest personal commitment was probably that to the Stamp Club, a reflection of his own lifelong passion for philately. Here, many younger children were introduced to the colours and countries of the Empire and the rulers and nations of the world, as well as to the delights of taxonomy and catalogues, without even realising they were under instruction. Some even caught 'the bug' and started collecting travel tickets, cigarette cards, matchboxes and other such stuff . . . hobbies that are alive and well even today. The sea cadets, then a major part of extra-curricular life at Bedstone, were almost the only - and perhaps the most notable - exception to this busy portfolio; he did not go down to the sea in ships, or even yachts, nor was he a military man.

By the time I left Bedstone in the early 1960s it was clear he had discovered his metier and having engaged his considerable intellect and prodigious memory in the business of an institution that suited him down to the ground, had established the foundations for what became the basis of the whole of the rest of his life. And in doing so, he had formed the first of his great friendships - that with Ernest Rutter -

whom he later described as having a genius for friendship and (he once worked out) with whom he was, eventually, to share more than 10,000 pots of tea.

A PRODIGAL RETURNS (2003)

By the time I had retired and returned to the Welsh Marches in the early 2000s, I was unsurprised to find Arthur still at Bedstone - although both Ernest and the teapot had gone. So had Allan Pearson, another OB student, friend and colleague, who had returned to Bedstone to teach, immediately after graduating from university and, like Arthur and Ernest (and, so far as I know, no one else) remained there for the rest of his professional life.

All of them shared a view, uncommon then, very rare now, of the extent of the schoolmaster's role in terms of its scope and commitment, which differentiates a school like Bedstone from much of the rest of the education system, public or private. In his case, however, apart from a couple of brief exeats a working lifetime encompassed some 60 years, rather than the usual 40,. And, oh yes, a thwarted retirement in 1992 - party, tributes and farewells culminating merely in a self-assigned change of roles on the following Monday.

By the middle 1990s he had long given up regular class teaching, now undertaking support, and coaching and organising. He had also become a licensed CofE lay-preacher and was acting as school chaplain, and had extended his huge commitment to serving both the school and other local clubs and communities, by including his local parish - where he was, in effect, chief financial and chief operating officer.

These many accomplishments were all the more remarkable for being 'hand-crafted'. He seemed to have almost no interest in exploring and/or exploiting post-Darwinian ideas, knowledge and technology - or indeed Science of any kind - except that which had become wholly commoditised. Telephones, electric light, broadcast radio and TV, cameras, cars, domestic appliances - yes: other stuff, hands-on or not, computers, whiteboards, the internet, the origins and/or fate of the universe and the amazing wavy antics of fundamental particles, unless embodied in a *Times* crossword clue, were mysteries for others to negotiate.

In this he seemed resolved to be, almost literally, a 19th century figure, an assertion he did not trouble to deny. Indeed, it was a position he would obstinately defend, often to the concern of those who sought to ensure his safety by getting him to carry a personal alarm or mobile or engage him in that amazing library that is the world wide web.

Of course most people don't ordinarily get closely involved in such stuff. But the world of play for the modern child, as well as the means of their instruction, is filled with play stations, smart phones/watches, pads and PCs, the internet, social media and email all of which he eschewed and, in the context of his otherwise quiet and gentle disposition, did so stubbornly and even aggressively. After all, engaging and mentoring the minds of younger children was what he loved and what he did; and the fond memories, warm tributes and expressions of gratitude of so many of his former students of earlier years, following his death, testify to his effectiveness.

I consider myself hugely lucky and privileged to have known him for almost lifetime and to have been his friend. He was always an entertaining conversationalist, a gracious guest, a wonderful lunch/dinner companion and the archetype of what a powerful and civilised mind, totally uncontaminated by envy or ambition, can be.

Born in south London, he never knew his father and was reared by his mother, for whom he in turn cared throughout her life, later bringing her from the anonymous grey urban environs of Anerley and Forest Hill to the rolling green beauty of south Shropshire and the close community of village life in Clunbury, which cared for him so warmly and so well during his final months. And there they both will stay; forever reunited in the little churchyard, just a short walk from where they lived.

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