

## DENNIS DAY 1932-2018

Years ago Dennis himself asked me to speak on this occasion and I am very honoured – and relieved! -to be here today to fulfil that promise. It has been hanging over me a bit. It was always going to be a sad day, but it is now also a merciful release for Dennis and a moment for us to celebrate and give thanks for the life of a remarkable friend and colleague.

I first met Dennis at tea-time on the 17 April 1971. If you didn't notice that 17/4/71 is a palindrome, don't worry, Dennis would have done. How can I be so precise about that meeting? It was the day I moved my personal belongings into the Masters' Tower, just before my first term at Lancing. Dennis came out of his neighbouring room, offered to help and gave me tea. Apart from the Head and my head of department, he was the first Lancing colleague I met. I shall never forget his kindness and reassurance. I had just been on a retreat in southern Ireland and only had an Irish pound note in my pocket which Dennis took in exchange for an English one so I could afford to get my father's car back to Norfolk. Our Norfolk origins formed an instant bond between us. Accommodation in the Tower then was very primitive but the occupants were sociable and welcoming. We were looked after by the Common Room Steward, Wilfred Barrell who brought tea to our rooms at 7.00am, announcing the weather as he did so. Dennis never forgot being woken by the cry of 'dirty old day!' He loved anecdotes and catchphrases and could laugh at himself. It has been said how fitting it was for a Christian to die on Easter morning, as our reading from St John will suggest; but Dennis would also have liked it being April Fools' Day.

Dennis was born in Norwich in 1932. On his mother's side he was connected to Steward and Patterson, the brewers, and inevitably to insurance; his father was a pharmacist, running a Chemists shop, and was a church organist. Dennis had one sister, Muriel, and cousins with whom and their families he kept in touch (sometimes providing maths tuition). Our sympathy goes out to his family and all who loved him. Dennis was brought up in something of a Victorian household, straight-laced, private, religious and protective. His mother was a very strong influence. He went to the splendid Norwich School where he was Head Boy and enjoyed acting, ultimately appearing as Malvolio in Twelfth Night – yellow stockings, cross garters and all! To someone who also came from Norfolk, Dennis clearly retained a vestigial Norfolk accent all his life. This is a 'foonerul' and he relished those enigmatic dialect tales with their oblique laconic punchlines: Imperative Head of Norwich School to passing pupil: 'Have that bell rung!': Pupil: 'No, that haven't'. One more? 'Excuse me my good man, where does this road go?' 'That don't go nowhere. That stay hare where tha''s waarnted'. But, in spite of resistance at home, he broke away, winning an open mathematical scholarship at Corpus Christi Cambridge where he achieved a double first.

That is a very rare distinction and it was a real coup for John Dancy to appoint him to the Maths department at Lancing in 1956 at the age of 24. The two missing years were spent doing National Service in the Army, a detail which may explain the rather incongruous fact that for five years, Dennis was an officer in the RAF section of the CCF. This ended when he

established community service at Lancing – the first of the ‘outreach’ initiatives of which the strawberry teas on the Chapel lawn were quintessential DJD events. A quiet Christian concern for others suffused all he did. Also rather surprisingly, he was an active athletics coach and a qualified middle distance expert. His guru in this was Christopher Chamberlin, another Norfolk man, whose house tutor he was in Teme before joining Patrick Halsey in Field’s in 1963. Through Dennis’s talent for affectionate mimicry these legends of the past, along with Provost Morrell and the Blacker and others, were kept alive for years. He was a living link to the old Lancing, having started there very young. There is a black and white photograph of him teaching in his Great School classroom in the 1950s – thin, ascetic, bespectacled, smiling, in a gown, with a chalk board, sloping oak desks and a handful of excessively smart and attentive boys. Marketing! He became part of a group of dedicated, resident, pipe-smoking, Spartan, tweed-wearing, outdoorsy bachelors, driving old Rolls Royces and taking energetic holidays. He was Head of Maths from 1962 to 1973.

In 1973 Dennis was the natural successor to Paul Witherington in Field’s. Paul had preserved the ethos established by Tiger Halsey in the 1930s. Under Dennis’s benign and punctilious watch Field’s continued to be a happy, well-organised house with a strong identity to which the boys were intensely loyal. It was a golden age. The housemaster had a small flat right in the middle of the house and lived his entire life in the public gaze. There was no time off in term-time. Every evening, round an open fire in winter, there was ‘hot air’ – senior boys chatting with members of staff who dropped in. Help with evening schools and tutorial advice were always available, as was pride in the achievements of the agrarians and concern for their welfare. Vast quantities of Bourbon biscuits and hot drinks were consumed. Every year on Dennis’s birthday there was a big party with strawberries and cream and a carefully constructed speech from the housemaster. House concerts were riotous affairs, on one occasion including a rendition of ‘Go West’ by Village People, completely choreographed, and featuring the housemaster, the prefects and the matron.

This brings me to Sheila. Lancing was then very much a male preserve and Dennis had a sheltered upbringing, but he had an excellent and respectful rapport with women. Generations of girl pupils, tutees and colleagues will vouch for this. He was particularly kind and hospitable to colleagues’ spouses and children. He had also been very appreciative of cleaners and laundry ladies. In 1974 he wrote in the magazine an obituary on Mattie Owen who had been laundry lady in Field’s for 37 years. It encapsulates Dennis’s philosophy of pastoral care and contains the revealing sentence ‘Lancing and she each gave life to each other; here was found scope for her qualities and vigour.’ Dennis was in awe of his first matron Fanny Taylor. But in 1976 Sheila Townsend arrived like a breath of fresh air – or perhaps a hurricane. This coincided with the sudden increase in sixth form girl numbers and the appointment of women teachers. All to be celebrated on May 12 at Manor’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At the time, on a personal level, this was a difficult transition for some, but Dennis adapted and was amused by the later conversion of Field’s to a girls’ house. He and Sheila worked well together for the rest of his housemastership. Let me quote the obituary

he wrote for her years later in the OL Club magazine (and listen for the characteristic Day cadence): 'being on her own, she sought employment at Lancing College and settled into her job and the community with great diligence and aptitude. . . She treated those in her charge with real affection and all had benefit from her counsel and kindness . . . she could seem a bit 'bossy' at first, but any such concern soon melted through her charm and humour . . .she was always one to turn to with troubles or worries.' The housemaster certainly benefited from those qualities!

In 1987 Dennis left Field's and moved out to a flat in Worthing. He had inevitably become institutionalised and he greatly valued his privacy and his 'ordered life'. There is a real conflict between the desire to be alone and the fear of loneliness. The last year in Field's was beset by anxiety about change, chaos and dependency. This led to a period of clinical depression. Our valued friend and colleague Alan Black stepped into the breach. Alan is very sorry not to be able to be here today. Dennis pulled through and was soon appointed Senior Administrator, a post which became Senior Master, and in effect a member of senior management. In this role he managed the timetable, produced the calendar and Blue Book and organised major school events, dealing very tactfully with fellow staff, OLs and parents. He established many of the current patterns of school life. He had a mind perfectly suited to this role – being a sort of prototype VLE on legs – and a courtesy of manner which beguiled the support of all. He had an impish and innocent sense of humour and a quirky turn of phrase. His mischievous wit was rather tangential with an infectious chuckle. He was very good at cryptic crosswords and all kinds of numerical puzzles. In the Archives is this little anecdote written out in his own hand. I quote: 'How three batsmen were out off one delivery at Lancing in the 1920s: The ball was bowled to Shaw mi, who hit it onto the head of Bosanquet, the other batsman. Shaw was caught, off Bosanquet's head, by a fielder; Bosanquet was out – knocked out - and number 11 had nobody to go in with. And (underlined) Bosanquet went on to get a first in Maths at Oxford'. After the sleeping policemen had been installed, Dennis would still take his Triumph Dolomite down the drive at speed having worked out the exact velocity which could be attained to minimise damage to his springs.

In 1995 Dennis retired from Lancing after 40 years – his whole career – and five Head Masters, but he served the Chapel for a further 15 years. It was on retirement aged 63 that this established bachelor blossomed, like some rare exotic creature emerging from hibernation blinking into the sunlight and exclaiming 'oh brave new world that has such creatures in it' - and began a whole new chapter of his life. Although they agreed to keep separate flats, Sheila and Dennis became an item. They embarked on a life of adventure and indulgence. Did Sir Toby's words linger in his mind: 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' There was a perceptible increase in his circumference. They ate out, explored Sussex churches and travelled abroad, even to the antipodes and visited Sheila's children (Hillary, Sarah, Diana and Nick), who have been so kind to Dennis. They were perhaps an unlikely couple, but a symbiotic relationship

developed between them. Sheila's joie de vivre and positive outlook gave this cloistered academic a new dimension. As to the big question – nobody ever dared to ask!?

But still, I think his real adventures went on in his mind. Arriving where he started and knowing the place for the first time. Despite the musical gene and unlike some mathematicians, Dennis was not musical. And he did not often read fiction for pleasure. In fact he claimed to find words a challenge. Nonetheless, he did take part with gusto in various staff plays and college musicals. His acting experience made him a good public speaker and even mundane school announcements were delivered with such panache they sometimes drew applause. Any friend or colleague of Dennis will have received very carefully worded, slightly archaic messages and greeting cards written in that uniquely distinctive, curlicued script which looked as though it cost enormous time and effort – as indeed it did. I don't think he ever leaned to type and he did not really need a computer because he was one. For all his brilliance, he was in fact very shy, modest and reticent (a little like the Queen).

The outstanding fact is that he was an astonishing mathematician. He had one of those unimaginable heads for figures which people like me, who cannot add two and two and be sure of getting five, can only envy and admire. He could visualise numbers and their relationships. His memory was prodigious. It was said that he knew the birthdays of every boy in his house. I am sure he also carried the entire house bank in his head. Field's boys would come up to him in the Quad and ask for half a crown from their accounts only to be told their remaining balance. He knew pi to 50 places. At one Friends' meeting it was mentioned that 12% fees would be due on a contract of £22,562.40 and Dennis said 'That's £2,707 . . .' 'How did you do that Dennis?' 'And 49p'. Only those of you who got it can know what it was like to be Dennis. He helped many pupils gain Oxbridge places, pioneered the introduction of SMP maths and brought pure mathematics alive. 'His pupils revered his consummate clarity of exposition and elegance of solution', as Alan Evans-Jones put it. Alan is sorry not to be here today. But Dennis had the capacity to empathise with those for whom numbers were more of a problem. And not just other members of the Maths department; but generations of pupils whom he coached, often making university entrance possible and paving the way to lucrative positions and careers in science, engineering and finance – or as headmasters. He was, put simply, a brilliant teacher at all levels. A few lines from emails recently received by the College: 'Mr Day was very good at explaining calculus in particular and making us think from basics.'; 'I once complained that it was unfair that he taught top sets when it was the bottom sets that needed his inspiration. So he moved down to help my class and got me through my O level.'; 'I am afraid to say that, in spite of Mr Day's excellent teaching, I failed A level Mathematics. Not only was I humiliated by this but I subsequently discovered I was the only boy ever to have failed after his teaching. It is a guilt I have carried with me ever since.'; 'He was one of the best masters I had at Lancing – and there weren't many bad ones.' And his tutorial pupil Joanna Sherratt describes how in his last teaching year, Dennis learnt the syllabus for Applied Maths which he had not taught for

years, and tutored her to an A grade in his own time. One famous property tycoon, whom he got into Cambridge, gave him £100k to spend how he wished and with characteristic generosity he endowed a Sixth Form Maths Scholarship in addition to the DJD Maths Prize, which he had given on retirement, and paid for the new floor in the Chapel crypt apse.

That gift was only a tiny part of what Dennis did for the Chapel. As early as 1961 he became one of the first lay assistants administering the chalice at the school Eucharist. He was a devout, unpretentious Christian, a regular church-goer, at Lancing and here at St Mary's Storrington, and a visitor to places of pilgrimage. Under the influence of those aforementioned legends, Dennis joined the committee of the Friends of Lancing Chapel in 1964. Soon afterwards he became their secretary and his handwritten minutes are in the Archives. He was also the tireless secretary of the Chapel Trust and secured substantial funding from the landfill tax credit scheme. The company which helped us was BIFFA. I think Dennis felt that was not a suitably dignified name for a large industrial concern and whenever he had to say the word, he would shake his head a little, purse his lips, look down, pause and spit it out: mBiffah! . . . as though he had tasted their produce. He remained on the Friends committee till 2012, for years as Vice-Chairman, and he chaired the Chapel Fabric Committee for seventeen years, taking a real interest in the maintenance of the Chapel and quietly supporting its chaplains. It is good to know that he attended the Lancing carol service last year. This was thanks to Ginny Ward who has been one of his most stalwart friends and helpers of late. In conjunction with Jim Woodhouse, another Norfolk man, he gave a stained glass window in the crypt aisle in honour of Dame Julian of Norwich, the rhetorical 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic, whose famous reassuring words are quoted at the end of TS Eliot's 'Little Gidding'. The perfect antidote to anxiety: 'all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.' By the way the phrase 'rhetorical mystic' is a wonderful source of anagrams!

Dennis's hospitality was legendary and usually centred round his birthday. Field's had an annual party on that day. When he retired in 95 he gave a sumptuous lunch for family and friends (I sat next to his 90 year old aunt Hettie) and a dinner for all his colleagues. In 2002, at 70, there was a rather symbolic lunch at the Old Forge just down the road here. And in 2012, aged 80, he gave three lunches for about 25 people each time at the Ardington: at each he spoke with style and whimsical wit. These events will have cost him dear, not so much financially as in preparation and social effort. He was hard to repay. We took him to see Kiss Me Kate at Chichester later that year, but by then he was beginning to fade. Generous and kind, Dennis showed real concern for others. Ken Shearwood, on hearing of his death, said 'he as one of the nicest people you could ever wish to meet.'

In a strange ironic equation, Sheila, who was somewhat older, supported Dennis for years, but as she declined, he moved to Storrington to look after her and for the four years that she was cared for in Sussex Down, Dennis walked up there twice a day to sit with her and he spoke movingly at her funeral in 2011. As Dame Julian says: 'Wouldst thou know thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Love was his meaning . . .' After that Dennis slid into what might be

called his Eeyore years, having been everything from Tigger to Owl, and even Pooh. He hated losing his mobility and his dapper, precise self-sufficiency. Physical infirmity meant he needed constant care and this he received from the lovely staff at Sussex Down. His cousins Linda and David and their late sister Mary, and Sheila's daughters helped him; Storrington parishioners and old friends visited - Ginny and Eamon and Wendy and Robin and Pauline among them - and his neighbour Dick Bland who discovered his penchant for Macdonalds. But it was not easy: he had entered a place, in Malvolio's words, of 'hideous darkness.' But a few days before his death he could still raise a smile of resignation, knowing that 'he that doeth the truth, cometh to the light.' The wonderful hymn we are about to sing says it all.

'Dear Lord and father of mankind . . . .'

Jeremy Tomlinson