

Retirement Tribute – Bob Smith



Bob Smith: 37 Years at The Perse

The following tribute was kindly written by Richard Crabtree and Adrian Roberts.

Bob Smith would not like this said, but with his departure we do come to the end of an era. Since he came to The Perse, his first teaching appointment, in September 1973 from the University of Reading, Bob has taught no fewer than 111 terms of Maths and Chemistry under four Headmasters. It has been one of Bob's great talents that he got the most out of those pupils who struggled with these subjects, often enabling them to achieve grades which they thought out of reach, as well as being able to challenge the most able. At the same time he has been a great colleague and friend to staff and pupils alike, generous with his sense of humour and bawdy laugh alike, giving discreet and wise counsel when asked for it and playing a vital part in providing that sense of community which The Perse has come to value so much.

Bob contributed to the Perse in an astonishing range of activities. Though not an athlete (on his own admission) he has coached athletics both here and in the city. One of the leading experts on hurdling in the country, he has mentored many young athletes to regional, national and international honours, including Jon Ridgeon who won the 110 metres hurdles European Junior Championships in 1985 and gained a silver medal in the World Athletics Championships in 1987. Bob's other sporting passion is rugby and for many years he trained successful Under 15 sides and then moved on to provide both technical expertise and *hywl* for the 3rd XV. He accompanied a number of rugby tours, participating in a number of legendary escapades. More cerebral pursuits did not escape Bob's attention and he ran the school's Chess Club for many years. He was responsible for careers advice for over fifteen years and involved in the General Studies programme for much of that time. He tutored in the Senior Boarding House, being especially valuable when all other staff were called away on Field Weekends. Bob worked tirelessly as treasurer of The Perse Players for many years and gave up countless evenings to deal with the ticketing and finance of performances. A number of deputy heads have been grateful for his unflappable and efficient manner of organizing the seating of hundreds of pupils, parents and guests on Speech Day.

Bob has seen many changes at the school. There is much less friction between the pupils: “in the early years there would be fights!” “The staff get on really well” – Bob has always appreciated the excellent relations in the Common Room. He is less convinced about the plethora of examinations at A-level, particularly in the Lower Sixth.

Many memories also, and a mixture of emotions. Malcolm MacFarlane careering around the school fields in his land yacht, narrowly avoiding grievous injury to himself and the surrounding students. A memorable, and emotional, appearance by Stephen Hawking on Speech Day and the tragic death of David Howie and Jim Perrett, having just completed their year and Head and Deputy Head Boys, on Mont Blanc. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that Bob’s concern is that in a rapidly changing school, the importance of its history is not neglected.

Plans for the future? Travel, theatre in London, athletics coaching at Cambridge University and to visit all the major wine regions of the world.

Bob’s sense of humour was both hilarious and sometimes completely off the wall. He loved starting up eccentric traditions: for many years he persuaded just one tutee in his tutor group to wear odd socks to school every day. “These traditions – you need them really”.

While most traditions come and go, Bob’s dedication to a job he so clearly enjoyed, his fantastic support of all those around him, his being prepared to speak out when he perceived an injustice and never failing sense of humour has become a legend to so many. We wish him the very best in his retirement, and remind him that he is, after all, just around the corner.