

Keith Barry (1913-2009)

With the death of Keith Barry, just a few weeks short of his 96th birthday, an association with the Perse stretching back over seventy years comes to an end. Keith served the school in one capacity or another for longer than any other person in its 400-year history. For generations of pupils, staff and governors Keith seemed a permanent, ageless pillar of the Perse.

Keith joined the school in 1936 to teach French and English, having graduated from Caius College. He rapidly became one of the significant figures in the Common Room and took the lead, with one or two other masters, in making representations to the Governors about the damaging effects of Headmaster Wootton's illness and difficult behaviour during the War. Keith had intended to move on after three years but the outbreak of war led him to wait. Then in late 1944, with the end of the War in sight, his career plans were fortuitously derailed again. He had been appointed Senior French Master at St Bee's School but on the very night he wrote a letter of acceptance, Harry Dagut, the Senior English Master of the Perse, died of a heart attack. Acting Headmaster Arthur Hawkins immediately offered the post to Keith who tore up his letter to St Bee's.

Keith became more firmly established in 1945 when he took over School House from Mr Storr. He had married Beryl Boothroyd of the Prep School in 1939 and for twenty-seven years they ran one or other of the boarding houses. They moved to Junior House in 1948 and returned to School House from 1962-1972. In 1972 Keith became Second Master, retiring in 1978. His 42 years on the staff have been equalled only by R.R. Broome and M.H. McFarlane.

From 1938 until 1964 Keith was also one of the two masters *i/c* Games. He was a skilful tennis player, competing for the Old Perseans against the School until well into his sixties. For twenty-one years (1953-74) he was Secretary of the Old Persean Society and their President 1976-7. In addition to these many duties he was Chief Examiner in English for the Cambridge Local Exam Syndicate – he actually claimed to enjoy marking, as long as it was not the work of his own pupils. This role took him to Africa and Asia to set up overseas branches of the Syndicate. For some seven years he served on the Schools Council English Committee (from 1963). In these two public capacities it was, as he modestly put it, 'nice to feel that, in a very small way, I was having some influence on the national development of English teaching'.

In 'retirement' he ran the Appeal of 1978-9, the first since the school's move to Hills Road. £415,000 was raised, more than twice the target sum. Keith's wide range of personal O.P. contacts and his indefatigable industry ensured this result. Unsurprisingly, he was invited to be Chairman of the Committee for the next Appeal in 1988, when £600,000 was raised. He was a School Governor from 1984 and also on the Governing bodies of the Perse School for Girls and Stoke College. During the 1980s he also acted as School Archivist.

In recognition of his first sixty years of service to the school, a festschrift was published and presented to him and his wife in 1996, *Essays and Reflections on the Perse School in Honour of Keith and Beryl Barry 1936-1996*. In 2007, the Governors' meeting room was named The Barry Room as a further mark of honour.

Keith was an extremely efficient and organised teacher with a dry sense of humour. As a Housemaster he combined firmness with fairness and knew when to turn a blind eye. His administration as Second Master was impeccable, using his long experience and wisdom to deal with many matters himself, though never encroaching on those decisions properly required of the Headmaster. Indeed Keith Symons said he was the best Headmaster the Perse never had'. He was fond of dispensing hospitality and initiated the Common Room drinks cabinet. He also had a liking for fast cars. He once recalled driving Dr Rouse back to Histon Manor. Rouse was well known for his dislike of the 'mo-tor car' and sat hunched forward with his head secured under the crook of his umbrella while the journey was made, presumably at Keith's normal brisk pace. But Keith was an excellent driver right up to the end of his life, and had passed the Advanced Driving Test in 1963. He then re-took it and passed when he

was 80 and did the same again when he was 90! He speculated that his Riley sports car had been part of the attraction for his wife-to-be, and that Beryl was put out to discover that he had sold it to buy their engagement ring. Nonetheless, a very long and happy marriage followed.

Keith lived a very long life devoted to one school, yet there was nothing of the quaint, old-fashioned Mr Chips about him. Keith lived very much in the present and was ruthless at clearing out papers and memorabilia. It is a pity he never wrote much in the way of recollections, for he would have had much of interest to tell us. Always dapper and spry and very much on the ball, it seemed as if he would go on to 100 and beyond. But after Beryl's death in 2006, something went out of him and he made up his mind that he did not want to go on. He leaves a son, Christopher, and a record of service to the Perse that few in its long history can match.

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