

Hew purchas

Master, QE 1956-1987

I joined the Staff of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Barnet in September 1961. There were, I think, 32 of us in the Common Room. I do not remember exactly when I first spoke to Hew or he to me but I do remember when we had our first proper chat.

At the beginning of term I had moved into a flat-share near The Quadrant in Hendon from where it was but 25 (in those days) minutes to School in my very second-hand Morris Minor. It so happened that my car was to be in dock and I was asking round if anyone knew how best I could make the potentially tortuous journey by public transport. "Ask Hew!" said Bernard Pinnock, Head of Maths. "He lives in Hendon!" And so I did, and he did; in fact he lived less than half a mile away from me. With characteristic kindness he arranged to borrow his parents' car and gave me a lift. On the way home, he suggested that we stop off at "The Gate" for a jar. Thus began a friendship of 55 years.

Hew was educated at Mill Hill School and Chelsea College of Art. The slightly unusual spelling of his Christian name was, he used to say with a chuckle, taken from a novel his father had been reading. He was appointed by Mr. E.H. Jenkins in January 1956 as Art Master teaching two days a week and sharing the Art Room with the Music Department. Two further days each week were spent teaching at another Hertfordshire school, Borehamwood Grammar School. Friday and Saturday (the latter then also a school day for the rest of us) were for



painting and the regimen that he developed for his own “work” on those days remained with him for the rest of his life. In the early 1960s he became full-time at QE and, as the School expanded during the next decade or so, Head of Art within the Faculty of Design and Technology.

Always very interesting to talk to, Hew had a wealth of knowledge about art and artists and he was himself passionate about his own painting, until latterly mainly in oils. In those early days he was very much into portrait painting and he was commissioned by the Old Boys to paint a portrait of the retiring headmaster, E.H. Jenkins, sittings for which took place after Saturday school lunch when, according to Hew, post-prandial torpor was for both of them hard to resist! Many will also remember his copy (with permission from the National Portrait Gallery) of Nicholas Hilliard's “Phoenix” portrait of Queen Elizabeth the First. The minutiae of the lace, jewels and embroidery in this portrait have to be seen to be believed and Hew reproduced these with consummate skill. Both portraits, together with his large painting of the Tudor Hall (the original School building) complete with gates and lodge, were hung prominently in the School Refectory and are now to be seen in Reception and in the Conference Room at the School.

As we appreciate Hew's skills as a painter, I am sure he wouldn't mind if I tell a little story about one of his paintings. It was a still life of articles on a table in his studio including a plaster torso. Once, when Hew was away during the holidays, burglars struck and in the course of their nefarious intents cut the picture from its frame, carefully rolled it up and were away. It was later recovered by the Police, still rolled up in a tube and otherwise undamaged. Hew was very amused that villains should have had such good taste. Perhaps they knew that they were dealing with a potential exhibiter at the Royal Academy!

Hew made sure that the joys of art were brought to the attention of as many of the School community as possible, regularly changing the picture displays in the corridors and taking groups of pupils to exhibitions and on occasions on what would now be called “field trips” with the Geography Department to North Wales. He was so convinced of the value of practical painting experience and going to see first-hand the wealth of art and culture that was on offer that he jumped at the opportunity of helping the late Eric Crofts to set up Holly Tree Hostel in Theberton in Suffolk as QE's own Studies Centre. It was even used as a base for Rugby training. And if any proof of Hew's generosity and commitment were needed, I wonder how many know that he went halves with Eric Crofts in buying the first School minibus to enable groups to get there.

Anyone who went to the School plays from the late 50s to the mid-70s will remember the brilliant sets. As much as he could, Hew encouraged his pupils to make a major contribution to the designs, but their inspiration came from him. Painstaking research, meticulous planning and sheer ingenuity in co-operation with his D&T colleagues produced some of the most remarkable outcomes. I well remember in the Billy Budd production almost physically feeling the cool night air come out to meet me as the flats above the tween-decks lifted to reveal the night-watch pacing the quarter deck and experiencing the contrasting luxury of the captain's cabin at another scene change. With amazing skill Hew had transferred what he had observed on HMS Victory to the confines of the minute stage in the School Hall. And this was just one instance. Every year the set design was a great success and he was ably helped and spurred on by an army of helpers.

Old Elizabethans have described Hew as a much loved teacher, a mild and kindly man who inspired his pupils to achieve their potential with careers within the art world or more simply to



develop a capacity to appreciate art as part of their life's enrichment. He remained in contact with a remarkable number of his former students and he was always delighted to welcome any who cared to call on him at his home in Wells.

Colleagues too will remember him with much affection. He was a personal friend to many and a staunch one too, especially in time of need. He was a good host, a good cook, good company and, whether at home or abroad, good at picking out a good restaurant and choosing a good wine. He was well-travelled in Western Europe and had many an anecdote to tell about his adventures and the places he had visited and the artists who had lived there.

One year in the late 1960s Hew spent the Summer holidays in North Norfolk and, realising that this was his spiritual and artistic home, he acquired an 18th century cottage in Wells-next-the-Sea. From then on this was his base outside term-time where he could concentrate on what he liked doing best, painting. It was therefore only natural that, when he retired in 1987, it became his permanent home. He had already made friends with members of the artistic and cultural community, for which Norfolk is well-known, so he was able easily to immerse himself fully in their activities. And it was during this time he met Frances, herself an accomplished musician and keen amateur painter. They married in 2003 and were a perfect, devoted and well-matched couple.

Hew is and will indeed be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to have known him. He died in King's Lynn Hospital on 16th February 2016 in his 83rd year.

Neil Kobish AM 1961-91, Clerk to the Foundation 1992-2016)