

OBITUARY

Geoffrey Fallows (1942–2019)

Geoffrey Fallows, who died on 11th June aged 77, was an outstanding classical scholar and teacher, who did as much as anyone of his generation to ensure the continued presence of Classics in non-selective schools.

Geoffrey was an excellent linguist who loved nothing more than teaching the classical languages and literature. Even when he was Deputy Head at the Camden School for Girls (CSG), he still taught a 50% timetable, much of it taken up with examination classes, where his obvious love for Classics, encouraging manner and gentle humour quickly earned his students' respect and affection. Later, in the 1990s, as Headteacher at CSG, he fought successfully for the retention of not only Latin but also Greek through to A level at a time when the latter was facing extinction in state schools (in 1990 A level Greek had a total of 59 entries from state schools; by 2000 the number had dropped to 19). But he knew that the long-term survival of Classics in comprehensive schools depended on broadening its appeal beyond a relatively small cohort of gifted linguists, and championed the place of Classical Civilisation and Ancient History in the school curriculum just as enthusiastically as he defended that of Latin and Greek.

Geoffrey himself had received a very traditional education, first at Shrewsbury School – home of Benjamin Hall Kennedy, author of the eponymous Latin Primer – and then at Wadham College, to which he won a classical exhibition in 1959. After Oxford and a

spell of teaching at Marlboro College, a liberal arts college in Vermont, he studied for the PGCE at the Institute of Education. Here he was taught by John Sharwood Smith – a leading advocate for the reform of Classics teaching and the driving force behind the creation of the Joint Association of Classics Teachers (JACT) – who convinced Geoffrey, and many of his fellow-trainees, of the need to develop a radically new Classics curriculum for the comprehensive classroom, with less of the grammar drills and rote learning too often found in grammar schools and a much greater emphasis on classical history and culture.

After the PGCE Geoffrey taught for three years at Latymer Upper before moving to Crown Woods – at the time the largest comprehensive in London – where he spent five years as Head of Department. In 1975 was appointed Deputy Head at CSG, a year before it changed status from grammar school to comprehensive. He was very much in sympathy with CSG's progressive, child-centred ethos and shared his colleagues' desire to rethink every aspect of the school curriculum to cater for the new comprehensive intake while maintaining the school's academic excellence. In his first year there he played a key part in helping the History, RE, Geography and Classics departments create a new Year 7 Combined Humanities course, exactly the type of course Sharwood Smith was encouraging classicists to introduce (and himself later taught at Sheredes School).

Geoffrey was a very good colleague, unfailingly kind and considerate, endlessly patient (not always easy in a staffroom – and Classics Department – full of very independent-minded colleagues) and very generous with his time and expertise. I myself, as a newly qualified teacher teaching Plato's *Protagoras* as a set text for the first time, benefited greatly from his help and advice. Above all, Geoffrey was a team player. He threw himself into every aspect of school life with the same boyish enthusiasm, from teaching Ovid and explaining the mysteries of the

gerundive to playing rounders against the girls and performing in the staff panto.

Throughout his teaching career Geoffrey made a significant contribution to Classics education both at a local level through his membership of the London Association of Classics Teachers and, at a national level, through his membership of JACT. He took a very active part in JACT and served as its Honorary Secretary for three years in the late 1970s. His most important contribution was masterminding the launch of *Omnibus* which is still thriving nearly 40 years after its first appearance. For many years he was involved with every stage of its publication – as editor, production manager (the magazine was put together round the kitchen table at the family home), and warehouse supervisor (inevitably, all the magazines were stored for distribution in the Fallows' garage).

The pinnacle of Geoffrey's career was his appointment in 1989 to the Headship at CSG, a post he held with great distinction for 11 years in very difficult times, dominated by a succession of major educational reforms. The most significant among them was the introduction of the National Curriculum which made it increasingly difficult to find a place for Classics on the timetable, especially at Key Stage 3. In arguing for and, after prolonged debate, ensuring its continued place in the curriculum, Geoffrey was driven not by any sentimental attachment to the subject but by the fervent belief, based on his own experience at CSG, that Classics had something to offer children of all abilities and backgrounds. When he retired in 2000, it was a matter of pride to him that CSG was still offering Classical Civilisation, Latin and Greek to A level, and the fact that in 2019 CSG still offers all three subjects is a lasting testament to Geoffrey's tireless commitment to Classics.

Bob Lister (Classics teacher at CSG, 1976-83)