

Memories of Jim

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Having lived in (the unmentionable) Lancashire for a good chunk of my life, one would think that working for such a staunch Yorkshireman would be a case of chalk and cheese. But it was more opposites attract and I knew after my interview that I desperately wanted to work for this straight-forward no nonsense but kindly man. However, on my first day as his Secretary, Jim was unavoidably absent having to attend a meeting in London, and it was indicative of his kindness and thoughtfulness that he left me a letter of welcome, apologising for not being there to greet me.

Jim always had his finger on the pulse and the College ran smoothly under his leadership. That is not to say there weren't challenges to be faced which he met head on. He seemed to know instinctively if a problem needed dealing with almost before it happened and he would then deal with it efficiently, effectively and fairly.

I knew not to disturb him during the afternoon before a meeting of the Governing Body, when he would shut his study door and go through the papers with a fine-tooth comb, endeavouring to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.

His mind was extraordinarily versatile and he could switch from one subject to another without any problem. If the telephone interrupted him when he was deep into dictation, his focus would immediately switch to the caller giving him or her his 100% attention. He would then switch seamlessly back to dictation as if nothing had interrupted his train of thought. Sometimes the dictation would take the form of a reference which he often preceded with the words 'now let's get *n* a job'.

He always kept his military bearing and liked to retain the formality occasions demanded. One of my abiding memories is that on the day of the Matriculation photograph he would wait for the Head Porter, also a military man, to come and collect him when it was time for him to go down and take his place. Like a subaltern collecting his captain. They would smartly go off together looking impeccable in their formal wear.

Jim always came into College early in the morning full of energy for the new day. On one occasion he remarked on the amount of curtains still drawn saying 'high time those young people were up!' Another morning he came in cradling a young wren in his hands, and placed it gently in the ashtray on his desk. I was touched by his caring for this poor little sick bird until he told me that he was waiting for it to die because wren feathers made excellent flies for trout fishing!

He cared deeply about family, and particularly his wife, Betty. He would seldom accept an invitation if she was not included. I asked him once what he would do without his Betty, and he said with a twinkle in his eye 'get another!' But that was indicative of how much he depended on her and he found her illness and subsequent death hard to deal with.

I feel extremely lucky to have worked for Jim and my life is all the richer for it. My seven years with him provided wonderful grounding for my following 18 years as Secretary to the Master of Fitzwilliam College.