

JANET COX (1936-2020)

I was touched when David Goldwater asked me if I would write something about my wife who died in September. But also thoroughly surprised. Here I am, a has-been where the RGS is concerned – once Headmaster yes, but there have been four others since! And if I will mean nothing to younger ONs, I'm not sure that their older counterparts will have any recollections whatsoever of the then Headmaster's wife. It could be different for former staff – and indeed I think of one good friend of ours who is not yet 'former'. When a kind group of such colleagues had the generous idea of compiling some recollections of our time together to mark my 80th birthday, they almost without exception made some happy reference to Janet. They remember her busying about to get to know people at our gathering of staff which preceded the autumn term, and often again for our pre-Christmas parties, which aimed always to include as many from beyond the RGS. She was indeed, as one such colleague said, 'the most sociable of people'. For another she was a 'morale raiser' – a very apt summary. I cannot in fact imagine a better description of what she was to me consistently and unfailingly throughout the 60 years of our marriage (a landmark we had just celebrated this year) and more particularly for the 22 years in which she saw me facing the challenges of the RGS job.

There are probably Headmasters' wives who become over-involved in the decisions they see being taken – at the risk of incurring gossip about what in politics is dubbed a 'kitchen-cabinet'. Janet was not one such. Interested though she was in the school's extracurricular commitment, unfailing in her following and critical appraisal of its rich offerings in music and drama (and an annual visitor along with me to its array of summer camps), she had no urge to 'interfere' with those of us who were shaping the mainstream of RGS education. There is just one marginal exception to that, which may interest those of you whose days of youth are over: the surprise she expressed that I was daring to allow the School Song to 'lapse'. I had to believe that she was wrong on that, but she was right that it lost me a lot of standing with many a sturdy adherent to tradition. Janet's own capacity for that sort of lusty singing was shown to the world in her lead role in the joint RGS/CNHS production of Gilbert & Sullivan's 'Patience', this in our last year in the NE and still recollected by one who was there as an 'awesome performance'. Awesome was not how she seemed to her Church High School pupils, who found something inspirational about the way she projected her enthusiasm for history. This suddenly made itself felt at a moment of the Classics Department's trip to Greece in the year when they kindly allowed the two of us to join in. 'This is Lepanto!' they remember her excitedly exclaiming, before 'regaling us with an account of the great sea battle fought in the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War'. Let that serve as a reminder of the impact she made on others. She was, said another colleague, 'lively and colourful in style, enthusiasms, language, thought and dress'. Well observed on every point, I would say.

Alister Cox, Headmaster 1972-94