The Headmaster writes…

Monday 28th February 2022

Back in 2013 at Speech Day (remember them?!), we celebrated the centenary of William Ingram becoming Headmaster of Kimbolton School – one of his grandsons joined us for the day. Ingram was Headmaster for a remarkable 34 years through until after the end of the 2nd World War, and was then followed by Cyril Lewis who, himself, was Kimbolton Headmaster for 27 years until 1973. And so, 60 years after Ingram became Headmaster, Dr David Donaldson was appointed to the Kimbolton headship having previously been a Housemaster at Stowe School.

David Donaldson (DWD) was Headmaster for 14 years – still a lengthy stint when one looks at the average tenure of headships across the country. He retired in 1987 to his beloved Cornwall where, we heard last week, in his 90th year, he sadly died. No member of the current teaching staff was employed when DWD was Head (Mr Bamford was the last 'survivor' of the Donaldson era).

I met DWD on many occasions. He was a real gentleman and remained interested in Kimbolton School to his dying day. We last spoke when I sent him a copy of the current *Kimboltonian*. If you want to put a picture to his face, DWD's portrait is in the White Hall. Go take a look – it's top right as you face the Red Room.

DWD certainly faced some challenges during his tenure. When he became Headmaster, Kimbolton School was a Direct Grant School – this meant that 50% of the school's income came from parents paying fees and the other 50% arrived from central government. In effect, as a Direct Grant School, Kimbolton had one foot in the 'private' sector and the other in the state system. Today, all 100% of our income is derived from what your parents pay. Soon after DWD took over though, the (Labour) government announced that they were ending Direct Grant which meant schools like Kimbolton (then more generally known as *Kimbolton Grammar School*) had to make a swift decision; go wholly into the maintained sector and become a 'comprehensive school' or take the plunge and go entirely independent and try to make up the 50% shortfall in funds…somehow.

Taking the latter path, the 'somehow' came in the form of girls. Kimbolton School went co-educational at the Prep in 1976 and in the Senior School in 1978. The advent of girls to the community changed the whole atmosphere of the School. OKs speak about 'civilising influence' – which is subjective and difficulty to quantify. More objectively, the academic standards were raised immediately by co-education.

At the weekend, I was looking through *The Kimboltonian* of Summer 1987 in which a number of colleagues and governors wrote warmly about DWD on his retirement. Some of the matters with which he was dealing are very much from their time (wrestling with the decision whether to allocate funds so that the Croquet Club could purchase a champagne cooler!), others could be from 2022 (provision of lockers, uniform irregularities, salad bar).

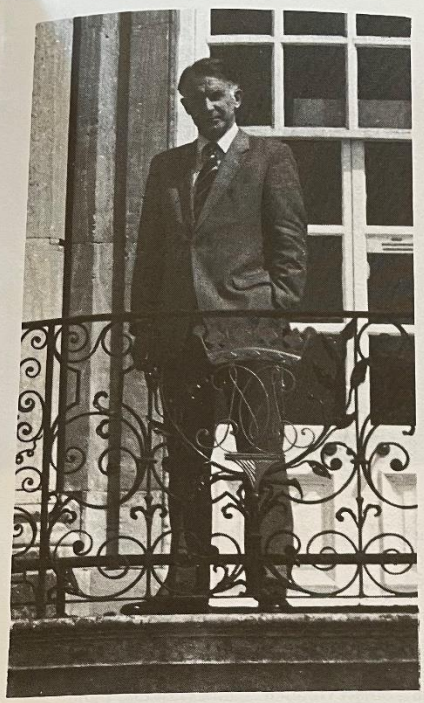
I have, of course, written to his wife, Marian, expressing the School's condolences and finish this morning with the final lines of the retirement address given by his Deputy Head, Peter Smout, in July 1987;

Any Headmaster must, to an extent, have a different public and private persona and there are bound to be those who never see beyond the public image. However, I was fortunate enough to know David Donaldson very well indeed: after all, we worked extremely closely for fourteen years. I knew him as an essentially strong but warm human-being, with the most sincere concern for the members of staff and pupils under his command – a man whose judgements were disconcertingly shrewd and always tempered with understanding and true humanity.

Headmaster

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Photos: Douglas Hall

