

Last time I stood here addressing a chapel full of people I was 13, doing a reading in Mass, and I think today I feel if anything even more inadequate. I was lucky enough to be taught for several years by Colin, as were my younger brother and my 3 sons, and the things he taught us still often feature in our conversations today. All 5 of us still regularly quote him, and say "I knew that because Stoupe told me!" I was supremely flattered to be asked to say a few words, and it will be impossible to do him justice, but here goes.

Caspar Tremlett had assembled a formidable group of inspirational teachers and pastoral staff at St Richards by the late 1960s when I was fortunate enough to be sent as a 9yr old boarder in 1968. I am thinking of the likes of Philip Lane, with his Tales of Ancient Rome and amazing capacity for giving everyone a nickname that stuck, John Farey with his ridiculous but memorable stories to help us learn maths formulae, and Simon Howell with his fantastic knack of making everything seem interesting to an 11 yr old. This is not to mention Caspar and Ursula themselves along with Fiona Rattigan, and Dickie about to make her first appearance on the pastoral side as a teenager.

Colin arrived to join this band in Michaelmas 1969 to teach English and History, and he was a hit with all of us from day one. I think the thing about Colin was that everyone just wanted to talk to him, and this did not change from when you were 10 to when you were 50. In those days of 90 boarders in the school, we would be assigned dining room places for a week at a time, and there was always massive competition to get on Stoupe's table, because it meant (even if he was occasionally a little bit late for breakfast) you were guaranteed a week of fun and stimulating conversation without any risk of him being over strict.

Stoupe was not strict by nature, but the fact was, he simply didn't need to be because it is no exaggeration to say that his chats used to keep us spellbound. I've thought hard, but I don't think I can ever remember being really told off by Stoupe. I think he threw a piece of chalk at me once when I was eating a fruit gum in one of his lessons, but that was about it. One of his many gifts was that you always felt like an adult when you were talking to him, and whether it was the horror of the first world war trenches, the musical development of the Beatles, the temperature of an atom bomb when it was exploding, the latest Wimbledon results, we just listened and absorbed the facts like blotting paper. He was a born teacher.

So I was delighted in the 1990s to return here and find the place in rude health, with a new generation of equally excellent staff assembled by Richard Coghlan, to find Stoupe was still here, everyone's favourite teacher, doing the job he'd always done in the same inspiring way.

Just a few biographical notes now:

I am obliged to quote Colin directly for this next sentence! "On 8th of July 1944 Colin Stoupe entered this world and within less than 15 months the greatest conflict the world has ever known had ended!"

Colin Archibald Stoupe was born in Belfast, the son of Robin and Elizabeth and younger brother of Ian. He was educated at Elm Park Prep school in County Armagh, then at Glenalmond in Perthshire. The family were in the textile trade, into which Ian followed while Colin, who showed talent in English and History, went to University and graduated at Trinity College Dublin. He worked briefly in a Prep school in County Meath before arriving at St Richard's in Autumn 1969.

At Prep School Colin's Headmaster was Willoughby Weaving, who in addition to being a first world war poet himself, followed a policy most unusual in the 1940s of having no corporal punishment, maintaining discipline and obedience simply because he was so respected. Surely this must have been a role model for Stoupe himself? No-one who has had Stoupe as a teacher can be unaware of the horror of the first world war, and can you think of anyone more non-violent?

Colin lived in the school for a couple of decades or so, and don't we all remember that room at the top of the fire-escape, where he had an American flag for a bedspread, and he used to sit on the windowsill on hot summers days and talk to the children playing on the classroom terrace below. He kept this room even when he moved out to the house just up the road in Wacton Green, and he finally retired around the turn of the millennium, perhaps driven out slightly prematurely by the ever more intrusive demands of the school inspectors.

I don't want to go on about them, but perhaps I could make one quick political point, and I say this as a compliment of the highest order – Colin and his teaching style were the antithesis of the Ofsted Inspector!

However, Colin hadn't quite finished because he was back for half a term at a few days notice to cover a crisis in 2006, and I for one was grateful because it meant, albeit for only half a term, a whole new generation

including my youngest son, had the benefit of knowing him as a teacher. I know Colin didn't really want to do this extra work, but he wouldn't let the school down when he was really needed. I think one of the slight frustrations of his life was that his enthusiasm and manner of teaching were such, that it was natural for all to assume that he was enjoying it all as much as they were, and he would simply want to go on for ever!

Colin was first ill with thoracic aortic aneurysm six years ago, and that is a story in itself. Suffice it to say that in my career as a doctor I have never known anyone else survive this condition, but Colin did and he had several good years afterwards. Sadly the condition finally relapsed at the age of only 65, and this time the surgeons weren't successful; the blessing is that Colin did not know much about the medical struggle of his final days, so at least he was spared a lingering final illness which he most certainly would have found frustrating.

So what did Stoupe teach us, and what memories do we have? Difficult to know where to start really, so I've just flung a few together. The whole of English History from 1485 onwards, with dates! American history – who could forget his descriptions of Stonewall Jackson, or Ambrose Burnside, or of the scruffy boiler suit clad Ulysses Simpson Grant taking the surrender of the immaculate General E Lee in all his finery at the end of the American Civil War. A superb objective and informative account of the reformation and Henry VIII, which was no mean thing for someone coming from a Belfast Church of Ireland background at a Catholic school in the 1970s. What about his description of the ill-fated order from Lord Raglan to the Earl of Lucan in 1854 to “attack the guns” which led to the loss of the Light Brigade.

But of course history was his second subject. What of the books he read us and inspired us to read, the Orwell, the Steinbeck, Tolkein, Hemingway, The Wordsworth (Lyrical Ballads 1798, I don't forget that) The moving appreciation of the war poets, the Shakespeare sonnet “Shall I compare thee to a summers day” And in between all this, we learnt all the grammar and spelling we could ever need. We all remember his tests out of 20, and we learnt! I know what an adjectival clause is because Stoupe told me. I know what Litotes is, because Stoupe was not exactly a bad teacher.

I remember one lesson Stoupe had written the words “rhetorical question” in his usual capital letters on the blackboard, and told us what it meant, and how it was slightly rude to answer one! At the end of the lesson, Philip Lane was kept waiting outside for 5 minutes because

Stoupe was talking past time as usual. When Mr Lane finally got in he took one look at the words on the board and said “Rhetorical question, hmmm, do I have to wait all day for you?” “Answer him someone, quick” said Stoupe. You don’t forget what a rhetorical question is with memories like that!

On one occasion my 13 yr old son wrote a poem for his English Prep, somewhat inevitably about cricket. One line was something along the lines of “Stuart Law must of had his weetabix” and my son had helpfully put an asterisk by Stuart Law with an explanation below for his non cricketing teacher “Stuart law, an Australian cricketer.” Stoupe had marked the poem with an asterisk by the word “of” with a note at the bottom saying “Of , a preposition, you twit!”

I remember the guitar playing, and the singing, memorably later on with “The Hardy Boys” I remember the Bob Dylan. I remember groups of us descending on his room in the evenings and insisting he play us Sergeant Pepper while he gave us fascinating accounts of the latest current affairs, I remember the infamous rugby match where Caspar mistakenly asked him to referee, and every offence was penalised by a scrum, no matter how heinous; inevitably it was against Moor Park and inevitably Moor Park were denied a win because of Colin’s misunderstanding of the rules. It was about 1970, it was epic, and I bet they’re still moaning about it at Moor Park! Colin wasn’t asked to referee a rugby match again.

I remember school outings where you got in Stoupe’s group if you could, because it didn’t matter where you went, if you were in Stoupe’s group it was interesting. I remember hot Sunday afternoons in summer when Stoupe was on duty, we would go down to the swimming pool, and swim while Colin supervised from the bank. After a while one or two of us would go and sit next to Stoupe and start chatting. One by one, each child in turn would then stop swimming and come and sit round him in an ever widening group until we were all there, sitting in the sun, listening to him, enthralled.

I remember so many things because Stoupe told me.
He lived by true values and he led by example.
It’s a cliché to say you never forget a good teacher, and I know you shouldn’t use clichés because Stoupe told me. But you don’t forget a good teacher. And he was the best.