

Mark Hancock (Former Head of Art)



It was with a sense of profound shock that I opened an e-mail from Mark Hancock's wife, Verity, on Tuesday morning (November 2nd) to discover that he had lost his battle against cancer. When I last spoke to Mark he was recovering from the initial diagnosis and talking about his return to one of his great loves, running along the local canal paths.

Mark came to KES from Aldenham School, where he had been Head of Art, in 2002. Initially, he had also been responsible for HT and DT, but following a reorganisation Mark assumed responsibility solely for Art, which was clearly his first love. Not only was he passionate about his subject, but he was sensitive to the needs of the talented department he managed. The displays in the department, which showcased the talents of students he nurtured, always made cover on South Side an interesting experience. He gave willingly of his time to both students and colleagues, always trying to see the best in everyone. His own artistic development was not neglected, and he displayed his own work at the annual Vivartis festival.

However, it was outside the classroom that I got to know him best. Firstly, as part of a 'coffee club' that met informally before the school day started, although I have since discovered that he had too many memories of school common rooms with the acrid smell of stale coffee grounds and a bitter liquid drunk because of routine rather than any sense of taste. These occasions, usually led by Steven Pedlar, usually led to us putting the world, or more likely the school, to rights and giving us the strength to get through another day! It was out running round the lanes of 'leafy Surrey' that I really got to know him. He was a keen and useful club runner, and we went out running regularly each week either together or with students. It resulted in a friendly rivalry, culminating in the May Day Madness 'race', usually won by Mark (until his final year!). It was a result of one run, or should I say part run, that I first came into contact with his future wife, Verity. On the way back from Brook as we came up through the woods Mark became unwell and I had to seek help and call an ambulance. That evening Verity called me to let me know his progress, which thankfully was good and he was soon back pounding the roads.

Mark also played a considerable role in many of the theatrical and musical productions, helping Nigel Mott in the design, build and painting of stage sets, which were always of the highest standard and added to the professionalism of many productions. He was also an enthusiastic member of the Chapel Choir, accompanying them on trips to sing for the Guilds in London. His other great love was skiing, and many students will be grateful for the time, usually in school holidays, that he gave up to organise ski trips.

Despite being an excellent schoolmaster, his love of painting and his desire to develop his own talents never faded and, encouraged by the artists Ken Draper and his partner, the photographer Jean Macalpine, he decided to give up teaching and in 2008 undertook an MA in painting at

Middlesex University. At first, he rented a space in London, but following his marriage to Verity they moved to Lutterworth in Leicestershire where the Old Bakehouse provided Mark with the room he needed for a studio. A full time artist, he received numerous commissions, perhaps the most fulfilling being that from St. Johns College Oxford, to paint the Oxford Classicist, Professor Donald Russell – the result now hangs in the University centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies.

My final thoughts go back to the words of Ken Draper who told a 40 year-old Mark, on the suggestion that he wanted to be a full-time artist, 'that there was still plenty of time'. Sadly, for his family and friends, not enough. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Verity and their son Theo at this very difficult time.

Written by Nicholas Fellows, former King Edward's member of staff