



WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

Common Room Farewells
Cloister Time 2020
Coralie Ovenden



1989-2020

In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer occasionally writes about those who set about their vocation without pomposity or swagger, possessed of many talents, but modest about them all. Such portraits, like the Parson in the General Prologue, represent ideals which Chaucer quietly hopes we will quietly admire.

A good man was there of religion,
He was a poor COUNTRY PARSON,
But rich he was in holy thought and work.
He was a learned man also, a clerk,
Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach;
Devoutly his parishioners would he teach.
Gracious he was and wondrously diligent,
Patient in adversity and well content,
Many times thus proven had he
He excommunicated not to force a fee,
But rather would he give, there is no doubt,
Unto his poor parishioners about,
Some of his income, even of his property.
He could in little find sufficiency.

One such in that place of pilgrimage for all the talents, the Winchester Common Room, is Miss Coralie Ovenden, who came to Winchester from Christ's Hospital in 1989. Miss Ovenden has done pretty well everything at WinColl (save Winkies?). She has been a stalwart of the Classics Department, and also of everything musical: a cellist over many years in the orchestra, a stalwart of the Chapel Choir – never a lead missed, or a note – indeed hair – out of place.

Coralie is thorough and rigorous, known affectionately as Miss O. Pupils learn quickly that 'misso' is a Latin word, and they probably never again forget the perfect passive participle of the verb 'mitto'. For Misso is not to be messOed with. Help yourself to a sneaky sweet and you will have the bag removed, and be subjected to a grammar inquisition. At every wrong answer, one sweet is forfeit. Not a

teaspoon of sugar helps the medicine go down. Her passion is Ancient History, which she taught to A Level every year when it was on the syllabus. For the boys who are similarly enthusiastic, she has run an Ancient History club at her home in St Swithun's Street for many years.

Coralie sets very high standards, and empowers the boys to achieve great things. 'There is something of the Augustan matriarch about her', one colleague writes: 'she has the loyalty, determination and ambition for those around her of a Livia (so close is the resemblance to Livia that boys are convinced that Sian Phillips' portrayal in *I, Claudius* was based on her) or an Agrippina the Younger' – though Mr Baddeley need not go on to assure us that 'she lacks the latter's murderous intent'. But behind this classical mask lies a deep concern for her flock. She cares deeply about the progress of every pupil in her sets, and knows all of their strengths and weaknesses. She is a fierce advocate for pupils and colleagues, and a generous supplier of 'horrid tea' (her term for anything non-herbal).

Resident communities depend on people who are prepared to give their lives to them. This Miss Ovenden has done. Few people have supported functions with greater regularity. She will not mind my saying that, despite serious injury in an accident some years ago, she has refused to lessen her commitment or head for the surrounding hills.

Like Mr Leigh, Miss O will not altogether be leaving us as she now moves to a house near the watercress beds of Alresford. And also like Mr Leigh, Ms Ovenden is too good to lose, and too fond of the school to sever contact with it. I have persuaded her not to lose touch, and to be available in hours of need, and have every expectation that her willing presence will remain visible at many school occasions. Those in favour of natural justice or revenge must all remember to ask her for a sweet.

Note: the photograph shows CJO listening to her former Head of Department Stephen Anderson singing 'Oh dear what can the matter be?' in Ancient Greek whilst delayed in a boat on a Classics Department trip to Sicily.

TRH
3 July 2020