



WINCHESTER  
COLLEGE

Common Room Farewells  
Cloister Time 2020  
Michael Wallis



1986-2020

You can usually tell the quality of a linguist by their repertoire of swear words and slang, Madame Lombardo once told me, amplifying the statement by averring that she had soon discovered that Michael Wallis was very much bilingual.

Michael Wallis's application in May 1985 revealed that he might turn out not only to have some characteristics of a trooper, but also to be quite a sporting and military tough nut.

It came on headed notepaper from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where Michael was at that time Senior Lecturer in Languages and Communication Skills in the Department of Political and Social Studies.

At George Heriot's School he had been a prefect for two consecutive years and played much rugby. He had subsequently taught at Fettes (no school for the fainthearted) where he had also done much rugby, and become amongst other things Weapons and Range Officer. And before that he had been at Teddy Hall, Oxford, residence of the heartiest of the hearty, both on the water and on the rugby pitch.

Michael's academic pedigree was comparably strong: First Class Honours in French and German at the University of Edinburgh, with a distinction in oral French, followed by an M Litt at Oxford on the plays of René de Obaldia.

Michael is known as a colleague not only of wide linguistic skills, but also of great and varied general knowledge. 'Sir, on any given topic, Mr Wallis is always the most knowledgeable man in the room', Cosmo Summerfield declared only last year.

True, that knowledge does have certain areas of particular strength. Michael favours discussion of *The Godfather* with his Divs. He is said to know the entire scripts of Parts I and II by heart, whilst retaining the true connoisseur's scepticism of Part III. It is usually possible for any internal examiner to tell those whom Michael has taught, for the prose is likely to contain words such as 'Flammenwerfer' and 'Maschinengewehr' (flamethrower and machine gun respectively).

For it is military history which really finds Colonel Wallis (as boys know him) at his most knowledgeable and impassioned – Mr MacKinnon’s vocal tribute does not risk hyperbole. It of course helps that Mrs Valerie Wallis, until recently one of our librarians, has had access to the stacks throughout the holiday.

Not that the military interest has been dryly sedentary or arcanelly academic. With Dr Webster, Michael has built up the school’s comprehensive and moving records of former pupils who fell for their country, and given extraordinarily detailed and erudite lectures about them on many occasions, not least in War Cloister.

Most of all perhaps, the Colonel has been Contingent Commander of the CCF – and a right good commander too. Under his fifteen-year tenure the contingent grew considerably, encouraged by the veritable Band of Brothers which Michael drew around him, as did adventure training, with particularly challenging and enjoyable winter climbing in Scotland. Highlights have been appointments as national Vice Chairman of the Combined Cadet Force Association, the presentation of colours by HRH Prince Edward, and the two military medals he has received in recognition of his service.

All this makes no mention of Mike the Common Room Chairman, Mike the leader of the Friends of Winchester College, Mike the subtly wicked humourist, Mike the family man, and Mike the gastronomical tourist.

Colonel Mike Wallis has given his life to the service of the school. Thirty five years? Many a life sentence involves less time in an institution. Over the years we have all been able to know and recognise that however tough may have appeared to be the nut, there is at Mike’s heart the tenderest of kernels.

TRH  
3 July 2020