



WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

**Common Room Farewells
Cloister Time 2020
Nick MacKinnon**



1986-2020

It is common to say that Mr MacKinnon is a legend. It is considerably more difficult to say what he is not. To assist in this task Mr MacKinnon's employment file was retrieved from the HR Department with the assistance of an overloaded forklift truck. The truck groaned, but we applaud. What a career.

Yet steady. What career? Is NIPM a mathematician? Is he an award-winning poet? Is he an English teacher, with not a double entendre in *Romeo and Juliet* escaping him? Is he a sports teacher or just a backgammon expert? Is he a Div don? Is he one of the nation's most famous campaigners against the BBC? If you doubt it, see <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/radio-4-fans-claim-victory-1558092.html>.

The problem continues. Was Mr MacKinnon once a psychiatric nurse? Or has that somehow got confused with the job description of a Housemaster, for he ran Chawker's in inimitable style from September 1996 to July 2009, with advice practical and homely: 'Never eat raw onion sandwich' or 'don't think what you all watch up to house is what real sex looks like'. If to some it may have appeared to be deceptively without order, yet it was never lacking in control: Chawkerites readily understood the metaphor involved in their Housemaster's dress code: 'I'm one of those men who still wear Speedos for swimming, because I need to know exactly where everything is'.

The file reveals that Mr MacKinnon answers to all the descriptions above, but for lodestones and for greater understanding the essential things to turn to are his special interests, namely Winkies and crossword puzzles.

Winkies provides the ideal canvas for NIPM's instincts: arcane knowledge of detailed rules, combined with wily anarchic methods of subverting them. I once suggested to NIPM that Air Chief Marshal Dowding, the OW who devised the tactics for the Battle of Britain, based his ideas on Winkies, at which he was expert. NIPM thought this worthy of consideration. Two days later, he told me he had dismissed it. Dowding had believed too greatly in organisational order.

Those puzzles are a surer analytical bet. For more than anything else NIPM resembles a crossword, with lots of words and ideas, and challenging problems, and multiple diversifications and offshoots, all in the end interlocking, but with full cohesion difficult to achieve.

So resolution the Headmaster can bring – and add this personal tribute. If Winchester is not about individuals, then it is not about much. If Winchester is not about scholarship, then it is not about much. If Winchester cannot put up with a touch of provocative anarchy, then it is not about much either.

Goodness only knows, Nick, how many problems you may have given to my predecessors – and that is before I pluck from the forklift truck my own contributions to the archive.

‘Hats off Gentlemen, a genius,’ said Schumann on hearing Chopin improvise some variations on a theme of Mozart. And few can do variation like Nick.

‘It’s a crowded field,’ one Old Wykehamist recently told me, ‘but Nick was the most memorable don I had as a Wykehamist’. Wykehamists of the world, unite. The instruction is simple. Hats off, gentlemen.



PS: NIPM gave 28 years’ service on OTH canvas. At a dinner scheduled for the end of last term, he would have been awarded an OTH pussey, socks and zephyr. These have now been sent by Mr Rogers and the team to his pigeonhole.

TRH
3 July 2020