

Ronald Anglin Elliott

21 December 1919 – 21 March 2009

*Oh good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweate for dutie, not for meede:
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,
Where none will sweate, but for promotion.*

The Bard has been pressed into service many times to make some point or other, but Orlando's praise of Adam in 'As You Like It' applies with particular force to Ron Elliott. Ron was the consummate schoolmaster of a bygone era.



In appearance he bore more than a passing resemblance to the cartoons that affectionately depicted public figures in the magazine *Vanity Fair* in far-off Edwardian England, the era of his birth. He was tall and spare, and as he aged, became rather stooped in the manner of a cartoon by 'Spy' in *Vanity Fair*. The new National Portrait Gallery in Canberra exhibited a large collection of them in mid-2009. There seemed to be an otherworldliness about Ron as if the ferocious pace of the modern world had nothing to offer him.

Indeed it did not. Ron Elliott exemplified all that is best in the traditional schoolmaster, wedded to his profession, keen on his subject, committed to his pupils (not for him the modern appellation 'student') and totally loyal to his school and the institutions connected with it. Education was his life's work and he performed it nobly.

The son of James Elliott, a Strathfield accountant, Ron was briefly enrolled at Trinity Grammar School in 1932, but then went to The King's School where he shone at Latin and completed the Leaving Certificate in 1938. In 1991, more than fifty years later, he presented a prize for Latin Translation to his old school. It was yet another facet of Ron's profound sense of loyalty and gratitude to those who had brought his talents to fruition. War broke out less than a year after Ron left school. He enlisted in the Citizen Military Forces in August 1940, and served throughout the war in a non-combatant role at a Supply Reserve Depot. Returning to civilian life in 1946, Ron eventually went on to gain the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Classics at the University of Sydney.

The greater part of Ron's teaching career was at Trinity, where he joined the staff in 1955. Schools were much smaller in that first decade after World War II, and schoolmasters had to be versatile. The loss of that versatility is one of the great changes in education in the

last half century. Ron initially taught English and mathematics, but not Latin. Not a natural sportsman, he found himself coaching cricket and Rugby Union 'in a most classically dignified way', as his colleague Ron Ogier inimitably expressed it.

As Head of Classics for close to 30 years until his retirement in 1984, Ron was, again to quote Ron Ogier, 'the mainstay of much that is worthwhile and dignified not only in his department, but in the School'. For ten years his Headmaster was Roderick West, himself a fine classicist, who writes, 'He had a profound grasp of the Classics. I suspect his Greek was even better than his Latin, which I from first hand observation found to be particularly strong ... clever linguists genuinely appreciated his sterling worth, and pupils in his matriculation classes had a profound respect for his learning.'

Numbers were dwindling over the years, and in Ron's final year, his Year Nine Latin class numbered only ten boys. 25 years later, nine of the ten attended his funeral at St Thomas' Anglican Church, Enfield. Such was his impact on outstanding students in whom he kindled the life of the mind and a love of the classics.

Trinity has for many years been a solid supporter of the Teachers' Guild, with J. Wilson Hogg, Headmaster from 1944 to 1974, serving as President, later followed by three other senior staff members. Similarly, three senior staff members currently serve on the Council of the Guild. If Trinity supported the Guild, so too would Ron. For many years, he attended all its functions, seldom missing the Dorothy Knox Lecture, the Annual General Meeting, the Annual Dinner and many professional development activities. He continued to do so long after his retirement. No matter that his active days in the classroom were ended; it was a Guild function, and he supported it by being there. For its part, the Guild showed its appreciation by conferring on Ron the honour of life membership.

We shall miss his gentle voice, his courtly manner, his unfailing courtesy to ladies, his genuine interest in the world of learning, his support of all that is good, noble and true. As schoolmaster, Ron unfailingly wore the black academic gown that bespeaks a scholarly tradition of teaching and learning dating back well over a millennium. For many of us, his life and practice were the complete embodiment of that long tradition.

Stuart Braga

Digi photo: Ron Elliott Information

RON ELLIOTT

In the year of Our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and fifty-five there occurred two events. The three decades since have reverberated with the effects of these events, enriching the lives of many by bringing them into contact with the Classics, or by lining the pockets of many whose task it was to provide spare parts. We refer, of course, to Mr. Ron Elliott, and his prime means of locomotion, 'Henrietta'. Mr Elliott came to Trinity in 1955, and six months later, he acquired 'Henrietta'. It is Mr. Elliott who has so enriched generations of Trinity boys through his diligence in his task of teaching them Latin and Greek. It is Henrietta, his little Austin A30, who has enriched the three decades of garagemen as they search for parts for her, parts now almost as hard to come by as Greek amphorae or Roman Cheese. Together, Ron and his car have become such a part of Trinity that their departure will leave a significant lacuna in the School's life.

So synonymous had been the Elliott name with the Classics, it was a surprise to learn that he did not immediately teach Latin on his arrival in 1955, but instead was shunted into Mathematics and English. However, escaping from these disciplines, he was free to devote himself to the Classics and for nearly thirty years has been the mainstay of much that is worthwhile and dignified not only in his department, but in the School. Such a statement may be made quite categorically for Ron Elliott is a gentleman in every sense of the word with the highest ideals and standards in his subject.

There is many a man who thanks Ron Elliott for inspiring in him that same devotion to and concern for learning. As well as giving so much to the academic life of the school, Mr. Elliott also coached, in a most classically dignified way and with the same assiduity and application that he brought to their academic work many a team of young cricketers or footballers.

There is no doubt that of this man, and of his service to the school, we may say with Virgil:
*"disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem, fortunam
ex alio".*
R.H.O.
Quotable quote: "Don't you know I'm incorruptible" R.A.E.