

Nigel Dodd

1931-2016

NIGEL WAS BORN FRANCIS NIGEL DODD on 9th February 1931. He was the youngest of three brothers (the others being Raymond and Gresham). The household had many more children as his father and mother ran a school in their house and grounds. Furthermore his cousin Ann, and latterly his adopted sister Anthea, joined the household.

His parents, Frederick and Kathleen, were a strong influence encouraging music and academic pursuits as well as enriching life with much more for all their family: I think of a black and white photograph of them on holiday, seven people side by side, each on horseback, at Killarney in south west Ireland.



Music was a key influence for all the boys. Nigel found he was rather good at it. At Charterhouse, after 4 successive years of his winning the school prize for music (as well as in that last year the prize for conducting), the school changed its rules, limiting the number of years in a row a boy could win a specific school prize.

Unsurprisingly, in 1948, Nigel won the Nettleship Scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, a scholarship intended to give someone with musical promise a grounding in the humanities. Nigel obtained an MA in English and a BMus in Music. National Service followed, with the Band of the

Royal Corps of Signals. He conducted, taught and played both viola and piano.

After this, in 1955, Nigel's English teaching career began in earnest at Maidstone Grammar School. When Nigel was considering a move, the Headmaster gave him this glowing reference:

Mr Nigel Dodd came to us in September 1955 to teach English and Music. Though he had only taught for one term at Kingswood School previously, he quickly showed himself to be a schoolmaster of high promise, exceptionally able and lively in mind, with an enthusiasm for literature and music which is infectious and which, when coupled with real scholarship, as in his case it is, demands and obtains much from those he teaches. Whatever the age and ability of the forms he teaches, he can be counted on to make them work: discipline has never been the slightest problem for him.

I shall be sorry when Mr. Dodd leaves us, and shall find him hard

indeed to replace; I shall miss him very much, for I find him a most able and stimulating colleague. His out of school activities centre round music, which is exceptional in its range and quality. He trains the Choir, conducts the second of our three orchestras and rehearses many chamber music groups; I doubt if he will be entirely happy (and certainly his talents will be only half-employed) unless he has some scope for his musicianship, but he has also helped with junior cricket, and accompanied the Senior Scout Troop to Ireland.

He deserves a post in a school in which his exceptional gifts and abilities can be used to the full, and I will gladly answer any questions put to me privately about this.

The opportunity to move to Bristol came in 1960, with an opening as joint Head of English at Clifton College. He took this up with gusto, sharing the department with Reggie Watters, who together with his wife Shirley, became a lifelong friend. After Reggie moved to Christ's Hospital, Nigel ran the department, continuing to modernise it until English was taught only by specialists, rather than form masters as had traditionally been the case. English at Clifton became highly respected nationally as a consequence.

Four years after arriving in Bristol, Nigel joined the Bristol Savages, an artistic and musical club (founded in 1904) that became a regular part of the rest of his life. As a Blue Feather, or entertaining member, he would frequently be the bedrock of the weekly meetings, performing both alone and with others. It was a place that meant a lot to him. Watching him play, and speak, on the one occasion I joined him, I saw for myself how at home he was amongst friends, fellow exceptional musicians and like minds. Cigar smoke and silver tankards are bound to the same memory...

Two months after joining the Savages, comes one of the most important events in my father's life: meeting my mother. It was at a Critical Quarterly conference in Bristol that Nigel and Alison met fifty two years ago. Nigel liked what Alison said about Shakespeare's *Richard the Second*. He asked to borrow her text during the break on the pretext of checking a quotation, turned to the flyleaf to discover her full name, struck up a conversation and went on to ask her out for a long evening of animated conversation. It remained a favourite work. At Halsway in 2014, Nigel gave a very well-received talk on 'Eliot, Coleridge and *Richard the Second*', which was later published in the Bulletin (as was an earlier paper comparing the approach to the writing of poetry of Coleridge and Cowper).

On the final day of that Bristol conference in 1964, they were supposed to be going on another date for lunch, but talk and more talk led to no lunch and, in fact, a dash for Alison to catch the train home to Northumberland with just four minutes to spare. Nigel had made quite an impression upon Alison, so much so that when she got home, her mother's first words on seeing her were, "Who have you met?"

Regular letters, flowers and visits to families followed during a swift romance leading to marriage in Balliol College Chapel. Alison once said it took

Nigel from April to August to get married, and twenty years before he was absolutely clear he “hadn’t made a mistake”. But for me, their relationship must be one of the most extraordinary accomplishments of his life. A thing to be aspired to! Fifty-one years, three children, shared interests, shared friends and overlapping careers, all with deepening love, much joy and happiness.

Married life started in a garden flat in All Saints Road in Bristol, with no piano and no children, although his first piano (a gift from his godmother, Mildred) arrived soon after. It was manoeuvred carefully from the upstairs flat of one of his colleagues, where it had recently been installed, all the way across Clifton, and down into to the hall of the garden flat in All Saints Road. It is nice to note that the upstairs neighbour, Veronica Harford, said she could imagine nothing better than waking to “Chopin at Midnight”.

After four years, married life moved to 44 Cote Park with that same one piano but three children. And after thirteen more years, it moved to 1 The Dingle with two pianos (the second my mother’s) and ultimately, regularly visiting grown up off-spring and their children. For those that don’t know, 1 The Dingle’s post code is BS9 2PA or, to me, BS9 “2 Piano Accommodation”.

Nigel’s children (Penny, Nick and I), were a very important part of his life. He had feared that he was not going to have children, so once he settled into married life, we appeared quickly. He was a good father, nurturing us when young and shepherding us to good schools and higher education. Family life had Nigel at the head of the table as well as strong relationships with other wider family members: Christmas was characterised by grandparents and Veronica enjoying the hospitality with us. Towards the end of his tenure at Clifton College, Nigel became sole head of the English Department and, separately, he also indulged a passion for theatrical performance and directing. Over many years, there were many productions with Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* particularly notable.

Two contrasting images spring to mind from around this time: a black and white photo of Nigel with Hamlet cigar dangling from his mouth, script in hand and Paisley tie, and another of him earnestly engaging all those on stage at the Bristol Arts Centre as he directed - with shoulder-length, flowing, silver brushed-back locks.

In 1970, he moved to the College of St Matthias to teach older students, first as Senior Lecturer and then as Head of Department. This, what some might consider unusual move, was partly motivated by the desire to work in a mixed, not all male institution. Between 1973 and 1977 he completed a part time MEd at Bristol University, his thesis comparing aspects of the social thinking of Durkheim and T S Eliot. In 1976, St Matthias was absorbed into what has become University of West of England and my father became Principal Lecturer and then Chairman of their humanities degree on which, by the end, there were over four hundred students. In 1983, Crombie Regulations presented the opportunity to retire early on good financial terms. Nigel leapt at the chance to indulge his other passion: music. If he hadn’t, the Bristol music scene would not be quite what it is today.

Many of you will know Nigel's music room at 1 The Dingle. It is a room with many books (much like the rest of the house), two pianos, stacks of music and William Morris wallpaper. It is also the room where, in the years after retirement, all sorts of music was made. Young and old, beginner and professional, my mother, my family and friends all enjoyed Nigel and this music room. Indeed, professional careers were born in that very room through Nigel's enthusiastic and skilled tuition. Nigel was a keen participant at the Bristol Music Club, was Chairman for a period, and became one of the two honorary Vice Presidents. Enjoyment and satisfaction as well as many memorable concerts flowed from his association with this venerable institution. There is a striking picture of Nigel (on piano) and his two brothers (Raymond on cello and Gresham on double bass), all in black tie, having performed on one of several occasions at the Club. And, of course, others will remember the rather special gatherings for his seventieth and eightieth birthday celebrations, also at the Club.

As well as playing and teaching, Nigel had time for much more composing, frequently in response to commissions. People will remember librettos including *Riddles*, with lyrics translated from the Anglo Saxon by my mother, *The Bristol Triptych* with poet U A Fanthorpe and Brother Savage Frank Shipsides, and, of course, his biggest work, *The Necessary Betrayal* (with Judy Weeks as librettist). This extraordinary work's performance saw family, three choirs, a full orchestra and the Sun Life Brass Band completely fill the enormous Colston Hall. It would not have happened without Nigel's drive and vision. His settings of five of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems were written for a concert jointly organised by Nigel and Reggie Watters at St George's Brandon Hill in Bristol, to celebrate the bicentenary of the first meeting of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1795. Many Friends now own the recording of Tom Mayberry, with Nigel at the piano, made after Tom sang the Lucy songs so expressively at the Halsway Manor study week-end in 2013.

In later years, although the nest was empty and health not as strong, life was far from empty. As well as teaching and playing, Nigel and Alison continued to travel: Wales had always featured as a destination for much of my father's life - brother Gresham's Blaen-y-Cwm in Snowdonia, an oasis of calm in a busy world. Travel to family (now spread across the country) was enriched with travel abroad, an annual pilgrimage to the Edinburgh Festival with brother Raymond, and his wife Doreen, visits to Stratford for the Shakespeare summer and winter schools, Coleridge Study Conferences and more.

In conclusion, after this brief set of memories and facts, I would like to suggest how I think Nigel will be best remembered. His departure leaves a legacy of music, inspired people, a loyal loving wife, three children and six grandchildren... But most of all, his departure leaves lasting friendships with many, many good and great people that he has met over the years. He was profoundly loved, deeply respected and an inspiration. Nigel, a splendid innings. Well played. Rest well.

Tim Dodd