

Themes:

As Lawrence's words so brilliantly explained, being an Oxford don – a teacher, a pastor, a friend to his students - was central to Mark's identity, and a cause he fought for every day of his life.

So today I would like to offer the perspective of someone who sat in his chair and was tutored by Mark. You could say, this is a micro history from below.... In the style of one of Mark's favourite historians – Carlo Ginsberg.

The short version – There was plenty of cheese. But no worms.

To prepare I went back through some of my essays, which are in a box in Sheffield. I found some of the best Whittow-ism and I have 5 topics:

- Holism, Trust, globalism, rigor, and pots.

Quote #1: Holism: 'Very good. Plenty of time for rowing next week'. This was a reference to the fact that in my second year at St Peter's I was captain of boats. Mark believed your development outside of his room was as important as your growth as a historian. Indeed the two were inseparable. Committees, plays, drinks parties, sports and seminars. Mark actively encouraged you to not overburden yourself with these things. Indeed he often bounded down the tow path to cheer you on, or turned up announced at a play or debate.

Now, seminars were critical – Mark's advice to me when I started my doctorate was to go to as many as possible on topics that had nothing to do with my thesis. But this approach was enshrined in the famous St Peter's historians seminar. For Mark these seminars were as important as your weekly essay. To be a good historian you needed a voracious interest in the weird and wacky.

This brings me to my second theme: Trust: In my second year Mark and Nicholas convened a seminar on 'Absent power'. The first seminar was HMH, speaking about the structures of power in the Carolingian and Ottonian periods. What a fantastic opportunity; I was doing General History 3 with Mark that term, and there I was in a seminar getting to listen to the great Henry MH and the great Henrietta Leyser in these debates. I felt like I was in an episode of *In Our Time*!

Anyway, the seminar closes.... And I, being a plucky and overconfident undergrad, was itching to ask a question. Mark thanked Henry.... 'Henry I will abuse my position as chair, and allocate the first question....' What an extraordinary thing to say. Let us all reflect for a moment. Three of the greatest medieval scholars in the room, and Mark chose to turn over the question to a chippy undergraduate... Just think of the trust that took... .. I could have said anything! I don't think I fluffed the question too badly. But my goodness. It is still my most vivid memory of undergraduate.

Mark trusted his students; their decisions; their minds, their efforts. On a weekly basis this was best highlighted by allowing you to choose your own essay subjects. Many tutors claim to do this, but none did it with quite such liberal disregard for the syllabus as Mark (even Lawrence Goldman!). The two together... my goodness. Every year students would walk into their office to

pitch their idea for a finals thesis.... Like a scholarly dragons den. Every year students would skip out, with a subject in hand that bore no relation to their initial thought and was rarely in the same century or country. I left Mark and Lawrence with two dissertation topics... which Mark repeatedly informed me was perfectly fine as long as neither were boring.....

He had an extraordinary turn of phrase. At one history seminar he thrust a cherry into my hand. I replied 'But Dr Whittow, I don't like Sherry'. The reply 'One doesn't like Sherry, one accepts it'.

Which brings me to my third theme

Quote #3: Globalism –'Next week lets do China... 700-900': Mark's words to me and my tutorial partner. As we all know, Mark had an extraordinary temporal and geographical breadth of knowledge. But he instilled that in his students. General History knew no bounds. One week you were on the Khazak steppe, the next the yellow river. Mark didn't care that technically that wasn't on the syllabus. His students would shoehorn it into their finals question! I know one of his proudest stories was that one of his students, Elizabeth Chaterjee who was elected as a prize fellow in 08, had written on the history paper that there weren't enough questions on India!

This global approach had a really profound impact on his students, instilling in them a desire to think big and travel.

- At a time where nations are turning inward, I think that this global approach that mark instilled will be a force for good in the world through them

Theme #4: Rigor: 'A good story, but empirically flawed'... All of what I have said suggests Mark was sweetness and light. But Mark was an intellectual heavyweight, and a purist. No essay came back unadorned with critique. Mark's comments could be ruthless. His kind eyes could be accompanied by an amazingly expressive disappointed gurn....

After my election to the prize fellowship Mark Damazar arranged some drinks at his house. At the end of the evening he asked me, what made St Peter's historians so good.

The words of Benjamin Jowett shot to mind, but in reverse. Not so much 'Effortless brilliance', but 'brilliance based on total dedication to your craft'. Mark expected you to work hard, to question everything and he never once let his high standards slip. It is something all his students thank him for.

Finally POTS: On an essay about The Abasid caliphate and the archaeology of Samara. 'What about the pottery record?' When I read through my essays I couldn't quite believe all the minutea I had remembered... HOW? Because Mark made history physically visceral. And his brilliance as an archaeologist was integral to his brilliance as a tutor. Pots in samara, bricks in turkey, wood fragments on the khazak steppe. On my holiday to north spain at the end of my first year I took a copy of Chris Wickham The Making and toured the pre-romanesque churches and palaces of Asturias. I could feel facts fit into place. In a literal sense.

But he gave us all a gift far greater than the knowledge we accumulated. Mark gave us all the gift of seeing joy in the landscape. The ability to walk through any space and see past lives come. What an extraordinary gift to give your friends and students. The ability to go anywhere and find the past. In teaching us history, Mark was teaching us how to travel with the people dearest to us and be joyous friends, partners, husbands & wives, fathers and mothers.

Mark's students learned that to be a good historian you needed to get your hands dirty – to scratch the mud of the forgot detritus of the past.... Hopefully avoiding worms. And then following that, you should head off for a good meal, with plenty of wine and lots of cheese!

Quote #2: Trust: 'Compare with Tom'. Tom Palmer was my tutorial partner. Mark had a sensational eye for tutorial partners. When you sat in his chari you had 1 and a half teachers - Ark and your tute partner. Me and Tom, and many others, would work together in the Bod. It is no exaggeration to say we were a band of brothers. And through the reading week we became lifelong friends. And when finals came and you walked into schools, t was those friends you stood with. To ask them a question, to calm your nerves. None of this would have happened had Mark not put his trust in his students. It is a remarkable thing to consider, that a man so brilliant as mark could see that on the big day, you would need them.