

It is the Michaelmas Term, 1976. A young Mark Whittow arrives at Trinity. Soon, he will startle his friends by having his shoes handmade.

It is not long - merely few weeks - before he establishes a strong bond with Oriel. On Friday the 16th of November 1976 he appears as 'Magician' in the Oriel cuppers play - Passion by Edward Bond. Helen Atkinson Wood plays 'Queen'; Neil Swettenham 'Dead Soldier'; Chris Robinson 'Prime Minister'. Chris has just arrived at Oriel that term. He is here tonight. He and Mark get on well from the start. They are to become and remain close friends, and to share a flat.

Inevitably there are eccentric incidents in Mark's student career - you would expect that with Mark, even though they were not necessarily of his making.

The play, for instance, involved a pig's head. With commendable thoroughness the small cast invested in a real one. No shabby papier mache prop for them. They did not expect the play to run for more than one night. After the performance the usual problem arose - I expect you have all had it - of how to dispose of a pig's head. The answer, suggested by Mark - of Trinity - and agreed upon by the cast, was - quietly and when no one was looking, in a rubbish bin in Oriel Square. Then came the news that the play was in the cuppers final. They had to buy another. The same problem arose In later years of course he would have cooked it.

With that success Mark's theatrical career at Oriel was established and it flourished. Trinity term 77 saw him cast by Ewen Cameron Watt as Sir Andrew Aguecheek in 12th Night in the Oriel summer Shakespeare play in the front quad - produced by Chris Robinson, directed by

Ewen - 3 nights and a matinee, always a full house. The annual O level set text play and that performed at Oriel were always the same - rum, that. Mark was excellent, in Ewen's words, as an effete fop, a perfect comic foil to that year's Belch - think young heavy ham - the O level schoolchildren loved it.

By this time Mark had started to read in the Codrington library. The Codrington was run with a benevolent hand in an iron glove by Norma and Barry. Professor Sir Rupert Cross, blind since the age of 1, and Vinerian Professor of Law, was the librarian - and it was he who was responsible for having posted in the library such informative notices as that which said, in Spanish,

'Everyone here is a gentleman, but where is my hat?'

It was exactly Mark's sort of place.

We were a small, agreeable, club - some 4 or 5 strong - of Oriel historians of the 1975 vintage, who the late Jeremy Catto had decided would be improved by being removed from the Oriel Library and introduced to the outside world, namely the Codrington; and as it turned out, Mark. We read habitually at one of the large tables halfway down on the left hand side.

We spent a good deal of time with Mark there, in silence, of course. While we worked with furrowed brow, taking copious notes, scowling at the ceiling while we pretended to think, and so on, trying to impress each other by the number of books piled up in front of us, Mark would only require one or two, through which he would appear to skim, making the occasional note. After several hours of labour we would all head off to Brown's in the market for tea

and cinnamon toast. There we would discover that Mark had absorbed and thought through rather more than the rest of us had managed. This was disconcerting, tho' Mark always made light of it. So after tea, back we would go to the Codrington.

It is fair to say that he improved us no end - Ewen, with his usual perspicacity, borrowed Mark's notes and essays for Schools - a confession only recently made. For years we thought he'd got his degree by his own efforts.

Mark also put us up to trying to improve the Codrington. It was not known for its deadening acoustics. A new reader arrived, who wore noisy heels and who habitually took a desk at the furthest end of the library from where the necessary books were to be found. Many were the books and many were the journeys, and much was the noise. After several days of this, at Mark's instigation, and it was no doubt in a spirit of mischief, we formally presented a stiff petition to the Librarian (via Norma and Barry, of course) which protested, and I quote, at the '*repeated clack clacketty clack*' noise and requested that '*a noble strip of carpet be laid which would prevent the same, so maintaining the tranquillity necessary to the higher study and thought befitting this fine and ancient library*'.

I believe Sir Rupert must have ignored it. Looking at a recent photograph of the library I see no strip of carpet. It was a rare failure for Mark.

It wasn't all the library, of course. At the end of his first year he and Chris volunteered on an archaeological dig west of Oxford somewhere. This was Mark's first taste of it. They were

assigned bulk earth moving duties and for days drove two little dump trucks around the site like maniacs, narrowly avoiding each other and those in the trenches. They had a hoot.

Mark was rather keen on trenches, even in those days. For a time he organised, moderated and judged poetry competitions in the back room of the Rose and Crown, North Parade, on Sunday evenings.. I recall him suggesting, apparently quite seriously, to Edward Dismorr, a good friend of his at Trinity, that verisimilitude would be added to Edward's verse (the subject that week was the Great War) were we to dig a substantial trench in his father's garden in Marston, partly fill it with water, and Edward to live in it for several days in damp khaki, while we made war like noises. Edward was somewhat startled by this. I think he gave up verse after that.

Mark and Chris took rooms in a house together out on the Botley Road. But that summer Mark got hepatitis in Turkey and was delayed starting his second year. That may have been a stroke of luck - Chris ended up in the house on his own. The live in landlady turned out to be a bit too strange to be permitted to remain at liberty, even for the 1970s, and Chris had to move out in a hurry after few weeks.

They then took a couple of rooms above the surgery of Doctor Dismorr, Edward's father. There Mark's enjoyment of cooking flourished - initially - and I quote Chris -

'mainly monster stews, and whatever we put in them they always ended up looking and tasting exactly the same'.

Maybe that is why the Hilo Jamaican Eating House and Takeaway just up the Cowley Road became such a favourite of Mark's. But his skills increased no end.

He entertained a great variety of friends at the flat, and it was a treat to be invited - the pace was often furious and nothing could interrupt it - one evening Edward's father turned a curious colour during supper, and was - at Mark's suggestion - laid out to cool on the sofa, tie loosened, while the splendid meal continued. Happy to relate, the good doctor returned to the fray, nothing daunted.

Mark also tried out working in the kitchens as a chef at an eccentric restaurant called Sweeney Todd's in George Street - that establishment came to a spectacular end when the spirit store caught fire and blew the roof off, keeping all the firemen in Oxfordshire busy all night - but found churning out pizzas too formulaic - there was no scope for the investigation of the possibilities.

On the other hand his efforts at games were not formulaic in the least - As Ewen recalls - and one should always cite one's sources -

'He was I think the worst rugby player I ever saw and his co ordination on the squash court was akin to that of a drunken flamingo.

But as in everything there was a laugh, a self deprecating comment and real determination under the surface.'

His close connection with Oriel continued - He directed the Oriel summer production of Romeo and Juliet in 1978, which played as ever to packed audiences. Indeed, by this time his presence in Oriel had become so frequent that it was not until some years later that one

Oriel Historian of the 75 vintage, and a regular member of the Codrington club, Simon Chick, realised that Mark was not in fact up at Oriel at all, and never had been.

I suppose that he must have spent some time at Trinity. Goodness knows when.

None of these pursuits and interests deflected Mark from his studies, nor did they suffer - the contrary.

Modern History in those days was British, started circa 500 AD, and ended with the Great Reform Act. After that it was all within living memory, or so it appeared, and didn't count as history.

Mark read widely. The more he read, the further back and the further afield he went, and the more interested he became. He had not then developed his remarkable knowledge of the lesser saints. That fun was yet to come. He hit upon the Crusades in about Spring 1978, and like the early crusaders adventured east. Around that time he told some of us that he had determined on an academic career. Well, look where that led - to Oriel, of course to begin with.

So what was Mark like, those years ago? He was exactly like you all remember him, except younger, and - I was going to say - not quite so snappily dressed - but I look at the photographs here, and that is not how I remember him at all! He was much smarter than that! - the same immensely civilised, well shod, well read, quietly determined, character; knowing what he

wanted to do, cheerful, generous, amused, amusing, and quizzical, and always ready for a good read, a good meal, good company, and a hoot and a giggle.

Max Lau Addition: There were many adlibs about 'Wild Pete Coulson', c.f. Pete's talk.