



Retirement? What Retirement?

by Jayne Treasure

Having decided to leave Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls (HMSG) after 23 years in 2013, most of my former colleagues were under the impression that I was planning to retire. To an extent that was true; I did decide to take my teachers' pension early after a talk about pensions on an INSET day a couple of years earlier (and here I must apologise to younger teachers for whom this may not be a choice). There were some startling statistics about retirement age and the likelihood of death if left too late. Someone suggested it was probably a ruse by the governors to get rid of expensive teachers. If so, it worked. As far as I was concerned, it was one of the most worthwhile INSET days during my career.

During my last few years at HMSG I had gone over to the dark side, as some would see it, and had become the Director of Studies. There were many aspects of the job which I really enjoyed, but I realised quite soon after taking on the role that the place I felt happiest was in the classroom with a group of students. It is much more preferable to spend the summer preparing a new set text than entering lists of students into teaching sets. I wanted to get back to the coal face and I also wanted to work closer to home. I had a long-standing wish to bring Classics of some sort into my local comprehensive, Crickhowell High School (CHS). The school was built just over 30 years ago and was an entirely Classics-free zone.

I consider myself to have been very lucky to have had the chance to study Latin from the age of 12. It was not a compulsory subject at my grammar school and there was no pressure from home to choose it. However, I was one of those children who had to wear a patch over one eye to correct a squint in my early years. It was not entirely successful and I found threading a needle more of a trial than untying the Gordian Knot and so when the chance came to drop needlework and take up Latin, I was first in the queue. Within weeks I realised that this was going to be best decision I had ever made. My introduction to Greek did not start until I left school and attended the Greek Summer School at Dean Close School where I had the privilege of being taught by the wonderful John Sharwood Smith. I met him again when I did my PGCE at the University of London's Institute of Education, where he was, once again, my tutor.

My first post was at Hitchin Girls' School, followed by Monmouth School and then Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls. Classics has obviously shaped my life and I think that if you can still get very excited when reading Homer, Virgil or Tacitus after over 30 years of teaching, you know that you have made the right choice.

My idea for life after HMSG was quite simple. I wanted to offer Latin lessons and be able to give the students in Crickhowell the same opportunity given to me – a choice. I do not (and never will)

expect everyone to love Latin or Greek but I do think it is the right of every student to have the opportunity to find out for themselves.

I wondered if there might be some resistance to my proposal. The curriculum in any school is naturally full, even more so in Wales where Welsh is compulsory, and Classics is still seen by some as an elitist subject (although there is much good work happening to change attitudes). My first step was to make an appointment with the Headteacher of CHS, Mrs Jackie Parker, and I went to the meeting armed with a long list of reasons to explain why the students at CHS should have the opportunity to study Latin. None were needed. She was immediately on board, called in the Deputy Head and explained my proposal; the wheels were set in motion. I was not unknown to the school. My sons had been pupils, I was a former Parent Governor and I had recently been appointed Clerk to the Governing Body. These factors may have helped but much more important was (and is) the aspirational ethos of the school. I offered the teaching on a voluntary basis for the first year to gauge the level of interest. If sufficient, my plan was to apply for a *Classics for All* grant in the second year.

The Latin lessons started in September 2013. Quite unbeknown to me, some very keen Year 10 students had already asked if they could learn Latin and so it was decided to offer the opportunity to that particular year group. Eight

students came to the first lesson; this quickly reduced to six. I have found this to be a common feature; the initial flurry of interest passes and numbers reduce leaving just the really keen students. Lessons were held from 8.30am – 9.05am on Wednesdays. Juice and cereal bars were added incentives. After discussion with the Director of the Sixth Form, it was agreed that I would offer a course called 'An Introduction to the Classical World' to Year 12. This would run for one term. Over 20 came to the first session and that number did not drastically diminish (although they were not always the same students!). We covered art, architecture, literature and a little history during the course. In term 2, I started teaching them Latin and then numbers dropped to just four students (but they remained for the whole term). Lessons were held from 8.30am – 9.05am on Thursdays. In February of this first year, a Year 8 student approached me. She had six names on a piece of paper and asked if they could all start Latin – and so they did. We met for half an hour during one lunch time. I also approached one of the local primary schools to see if they would like me to run a *Minimus* club and, once again, the reception was very positive and the club was held weekly during a lunch hour from February to mid-June. The Primary Latin Project kindly supported this venture.

I use the *Cambridge Latin Course* for Key Stages 3 and 4 and have found that it is possible, even with just half an hour a week, to get to Stage 9 or further in one year; students who attend voluntary Latin classes tend to be diligent. Although Latin is offered to all, in reality, it tends to be the MAT (More Able and Talented) students who stay the course (but not entirely). I applied for funding for CLC Book 1 from *Friends of Classics* and they very generously gave the school a grant. I managed to find some good-quality second-hand books but also had to buy a few new ones as the numbers increased. One thing I have learned. Do not allow the students to take the textbooks away until they demonstrate a real commitment to the subject! They can use the website to practise at home.

Since there clearly was interest in Latin, about half way through the first year I applied for a *Classics for All* grant. It is quite a time-consuming process to apply for a grant (as it should be) and I would encourage anyone wishing to apply

to ask for advice first. I didn't and I was far too ambitious with my first proposal. However, Hilary Hodgson and James Murray, the Grant Advisers at *CfA*, encouraged me to come up with a sensible plan and the school was lucky enough to be successful. Our particular grant funds three hours of Latin teaching per week and runs for three years. Crickhowell High School was the first school in Wales to receive a *CfA* grant.

With the funding in place, the opportunity for students to study Latin naturally increased. In September 2014, the established classes (now in Years 9 and 11) continued. Latin was also offered to all students in Years 8 and 10. The students in Year 11 were keen to prepare for a qualification: WJEC Latin Language Level 1 seemed feasible and lessons increased to twice a week. I was able to buy some very reasonably priced CLC Book 2. We did not manage to read the whole of Book 2 but the students completed a lot of past paper practice and concentrated on vocabulary. I also arranged a Latin morning during the Easter holiday which the students all willingly attended.

The reality was that last year I taught every morning at 8.30am for 35mins and one lunch time. The Year 12 course was also offered again but was not well attended. I have outlined some of the challenges later.

I am now in my third year of teaching at CHS. The *CfA* grant will run for another 18 months and Latin continues to flourish. There are Latin groups in every year from Years 8 to 12. Lessons continue to take place at 8.35 am on four days a week, plus one lunchtime and two after-school sessions. There is now a teachers' class, which is very important for the sustainability of the subject. As mentioned earlier, the Senior Leadership Team has been behind the project from the start. The Deputy Head has left to become a Headteacher and is about to introduce Latin into his new school. The Director of the Modern Foreign Languages Faculty is now my line manager and is extremely supportive and proving to be an excellent Latin student.

There have been a number of successes. The results of the WJEC Level 1 last year were excellent and further students (and some teachers) are preparing for the qualification this year. One student successfully used Latin as his

new skill as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Latin has become an accepted part of the school in a relatively short space of time. I have students joining throughout the year and never turn anyone away if they express an interest. In October 2014 the school achieved the NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education) Cymru Challenge Award. A portfolio of evidence was prepared, including a section on Latin, and six lessons were observed as part of the process, including one Latin lesson. In addition, *Minimus* has now taken off in two primary schools, with a second group put in place in one of them due to demand, and parents of Year 6 pupils are beginning to ask if Latin is offered at CHS.

There have also been some challenges. The subject is initially offered to all in a particular year group and is extra-curricular; the drop-off rate is quite significant in the first few weeks (and can be a little disheartening). However, it has been my experience that those who remain are very loyal. Another challenge of an extra-curricular subject is that Latin students tend to have many other commitments in a variety of areas. Modular examinations, which are still happening in Wales, can also eat into the short amount of teaching time and I have found it important to keep up the momentum. Last year the Year 12 course did not work as well as in the first year. It was a bit of a mystery: the same course but the reaction was quite different. There were a couple of external factors. My slot clashed with another class and with meetings of the School Council. Although I have three Latin students in the current Year 12, I have plans to offer something different in the future. With the agreement of the Director of the Sixth Form, I am going to spend the first term teaching Year 12 students enough Latin so that they can either help to run one of the *Minimus* clubs or offer a little Latin to a Year 7 group, which will count as part of their contribution to the community for the Welsh Baccalaureate. Although I had hoped to introduce this last September, I have found that it is sometimes necessary to let an idea settle.

A *CfA* grant is based on the sustainability of project. While continuing to teach the students (because I love it), my focus over the next year and a half will be on training other teachers, not just in CHS

but also in local primaries and possibly other secondary schools. I realise that these are small steps but, if enough interest is sparked, who knows where they may lead. It is certainly better than doing nothing. As can be seen on the *CFA* website, the best way forward is to create regional Classics hubs. Crickhowell is a small place so I am thinking of it as a sub-hub.

After my marriage to a Welsh hill farmer, 32 years ago, I left a great job in Hitchin Girls' School to move back to Wales. I commuted weekly for a term. When I finally made the move, I could not get a job – not just a teaching job, but any job. How things have changed. Now, after giving up a full-time job once again, I have been offered so many opportunities and I

have the freedom to take the ones I want; some are paid, some are voluntary. In addition to my work in Crickhowell, I am currently covering a maternity leave for one and a half days per week (to top up the holiday fund) as well as acting as the Clerk to the Governing Bodies in two schools. I have done some supply work and private tuition. I have also become a *Minimus* trainer and there has been a range of other invitations to take part in promoting Classics, particularly across Wales.

Leaving the security of full-time employment was not a decision I took lightly. I am not married to some wealthy gentleman farmer; in fact, my salary paid for our silage pit years ago. I would

encourage anyone considering doing the same to make sure your sums add up. The link I have with Crickhowell High School suits me; it may not suit all. I do not live far from the school and the days of going to work in the dark and coming home in the dark have gone. The real bonus is, of course, that I am teaching a subject I love to those who want to learn.

Jayne Treasure. With thanks to Classics for All, Friends of Classics and the Primary Latin Project for their support.

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