

Obituary

Alan Clague 1943 – 2025

Ashley Carter

Independent scholar, UK

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Alan Clague, who was a familiar figure in the world of classics teaching and examining. He was born in Liverpool (whence came his lifelong love of Liverpool FC). After grammar school, he read Classics at Exeter, the first in his family to attend university. Then, after a year's primary school teaching in Walsall, he gained his teaching qualification and taught Classics in Altrincham, where he married his first wife, Sheila, who bore him a son, Tim. Next Alan was appointed Head of Classics at St John's Comprehensive School, Marlborough, and the family moved there. After his marriage to Sheila failed, he married his second wife, Lesley, who survives him after 33 years of marriage.

Alan proved to be an inspirational teacher of Latin, Greek and Classical Civilisation, building up a Classics sixth form at St John's of thirty students. BBC Radio 4 broadcast an interview with him after he was named by a well-known children's author as her favourite teacher. A former colleague has commented:

'He was an excellent colleague and an absolutely inspirational teacher - he held the students' attention effortlessly and there was a real buzz about his lessons.'

After taking early retirement in 1998, with no intention of turning his back on Classics, he took on the role of subject officer for Classics for OCR, with responsibility for all classical subjects at all levels. He quickly won the trust and friendship of all the senior examiners, who found his erudition, combined with a gentle, unassuming manner, inspirational. After retiring from this post, which had required him to commute from his home in Berkshire to Cambridge several days a week, he became a senior examiner himself for OCR. When WJEC agreed to take responsibility for delivering a new Latin qualification in 2008, Alan was first choice for subject officer, a post he held for about ten years. He also acted as a reviser, a role capable of causing friction with principal

examiners when they found their best efforts pulled apart; but Alan had the gift of keeping everyone happy and satisfied. The comments of one senior examiner express this clearly:

'As a reviser Alan had the ability to rip a paper apart without making it sound harsh and his ideas were always sound. I always knew when papers came back from revision that comments made were supportive. Even now, as I have been writing new papers, I can still hear Alan's voice: "How would a candidate get 1 mark here? Is that question accessible to all the candidates?" Fair and fairness will be what I shall remember about Alan most of all.'

He always espoused the belief that Classics should not be seen as an elitist suite of subjects but should be available to all students. He was not afraid to challenge opposing views on this issue, even when expressed by celebrities. He was active in JACT, holding the post of secretary for a period.

Besides Classics and football, Alan had many other interests, including steam trains, touring US cities (where he would wax lyrical about skyscrapers) and, especially, cryptic crosswords. These he completed regularly, winning many prizes even for the most difficult ones. He also had a deep-seated social conscience, which led him to become vice-chairman of the board of governors at his local primary school, take on the role of prison visitor, and volunteer to hear appeals from parents whose children were refused admission to the school of their choice.

At the time of his death, Alan was being treated for early-stage lung cancer; however, the radiotherapy left him feeling increasingly unwell, leading to a fall which broke his hip. This caused untreatable damage to his body and he died two days later. His death has shocked and dismayed all the friends and colleagues who knew and loved him and is a blow to the entire Classics community.

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