

Anne and Bill Barbour
A Tribute from

Robert Northridge

Portora Royal School, Enniskillen

James, Pauline, Charlotte, Tom,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to have been asked to say some words about the contribution of Bill and Anne Barbour to the life of Portora Royal School in the four decades from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Bill was appointed to Portora as a classics master in 1952 and, in 1966, Anne joined the staff as secretary to the headmaster of the preparatory school, Gloucester House.

They both devoted the rest of their professional working lives to the well being of Portora and its pupils. As well as being on the staff of the school, for many years they were parents as well, with Tom and James being pupils at the school.

Bill and Anne officially retired in 1983 and 1984 respectively, but remained in touch with the school for the next quarter of a century.

Indeed, the last time that I spoke to them was at a reading of extracts from Oscar Wilde's works which took place in Portora on a beautiful summer evening last June. They both enjoyed the readings and a glass of wine.

The list of responsibilities that Bill held at Portora is a long one:

classroom teacher, head of department, Senior Teacher, housemaster of both boys' and girls' houses, librarian, master in charge of external examinations, school representative and branch committee member of the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association, Secretary of the Western Education and Library Board's Consultative Committee, Rugby coach, cricket coach and master in charge of chess

I am sure that there are more that I have forgotten to mention.

This long list gives some idea of the commitment that Bill, supported by Anne, brought to the profession, but he did not undertake these responsibilities in order to gain promotion or to increase his chances of becoming a headmaster; he did them because he was, above all, interested in the pupils in his charge and he wished all boys and girls leaving Portora to have a sound academic base, together with a broad range of skills gained through sport and other extra-curricular activities. Bill always saw his responsibilities extending well beyond the classroom.

In the classroom, his lively approach to the teaching of Latin, Greek, Ancient History and English, bore the hallmark of a gifted scholar; Bill had achieved first class honours degree in Classics at Trinity College Dublin just before the war, and he passed on his deep love of Classics to generations of Portora pupils. Many won open scholarships to university; indeed, one of the last such scholarship pupils that he taught is the present Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher who is also chairman of Portora Board of Governors; he was awarded a Junior Exhibition to Trinity College Dublin, and just two terms later became a scholar of Trinity, a feat which usually takes at

least five terms and this achievement can largely be attributed to the grounding that Michael Jackson received from Bill at Portora. Bishop Jackson asked me to apologise for his not being here today; he had a prior engagement in England.

Other Portorans, while not winning scholarships, reached high levels of academic excellence due to Bill's inspiration and enthusiasm. For generations of less academically gifted Portorans, his patience, skill and determination as a teacher were much appreciated.

For 23 years, from 1955, Bill was a Housemaster with pastoral responsibility for 60 boys; he oversaw their well being from the time that they arrived at Portora as 11 year olds till when they left for University or other fields as 16 or 18 year olds.

Housemastering 30 years ago was a many faceted job involving overseeing academic progress, dealing with all sorts minor disciplinary issues and giving careers advice.

The skills that Bill brought to this task were exemplary; he was firm without being inflexible, he relied on persuasion rather than threats; he saw his task as being to negotiate solutions to problems rather than to impose his own view. He treated each pupil as an individual who needed individual advice and support.

Bill had been a successful rugby player at Bangor Grammar School, winning the Medallion Shield in 1935. He had a deep knowledge of the game and coached and refereed for many years at Portora, especially at U14 level where the finer points of the game were not always obvious to the youthful players.

For many years he turned out several times a week and on Saturdays so that Portorans could be introduced to rugby and I count myself privileged to be one such boy.

Cricket was another of his passions and Bill was in charge of the sport for over a decade; he persevered despite the difficulty of playing this sport in the inclement summer weather we generally suffer in Fermanagh.

During his period in charge the 1st XI won the Art Green Cup and were finalists in the McCullough Cup.

Not surprisingly, with his classical training, Bill was interested in Chess; many Portorans were introduced to the game through the chess club that he ran, and the Portora Chess team won the O'Sullivan Cup for ten successive years.

During the 70s and 80s quite a number of girls were attending Portora both as day pupils and boarders; there were over 30 girls at one time. In 1980 Bill and Anne were asked by the headmaster, Dr. Alan Acheson, if they would take on responsibility for the pastoral care of the girls; this was not an easy task as their accommodation in the old sanatorium

was not ideal, but the Barbours brought common sense, good humour, and interest in their charge's welfare to the task and ensured that the girls were well looked after.

In the last month I have been speaking to several of these girls and they recalled the commitment, warmth and enthusiasm that Bill and Anne brought to this responsibility.

Anne worked as the Headmaster's secretary in Gloucester House, the prep school, from 1966 until 1984; her calmness, and management and organisational skills were invaluable to a several headmasters.

She contributed in no small way to the success of the Prep School which, due to changing economic circumstances, was merged with the main school in 1984.

Speakers after me will speak of some of the more public responsibilities of the Barbours. Bill and Anne could also be very generous in a much less public way; when my wife and I were new to Enniskillen over 30 years ago and had two young babies at home, Anne used to come to our house regularly to give Hannah a break and some welcome company. We greatly appreciated her giving kindness and motherly advice.

Portora was privileged to have on its staff such an exceptional couple. Those of us lucky enough to know Bill will never forget his intellect, wit, charm, charisma, friendship; his delightful absentmindedness yet his meticulous attention to detail; his magnificent command of language and his sonorous voice; his unflappability and his interest in people. We will remember his generosity and his liberalism.

The large attendance of Old Portorans here today shows the affection and respect that generations of boys had for Bill and Anne and the impact they had on many lives.

They will be greatly missed by Portora and this community but we all can look back with thanks on two lives lived to the full.