

*Tribute to Bill Gray: delivered by Professor Clive Behagg, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Chichester, at the University chapel 25 May 2019 2.30 pm*

Good afternoon, I'm Clive Behagg. Lorna has asked me to speak about Bill's early years at the University. I have to say, I am pleased and feel privileged to be asked to be part of the celebration of the life of this remarkable man.

But how to begin this story – well, I guess most appropriately '*Once upon a time*' – Once upon a time, Bill and I were young lecturers together, he was in Religious Studies, I was in History, at what was then the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education – or WISHE as it was then known (it still is known as WISHE by our sports students). Bill and I would be colleagues for some 35 years.

Bill arrived in 1981, five years after me. And WISHE was certainly a strange place in which to be a junior academic. Formed in 1977 by means of an extremely unhappy merger between two Teacher Training Colleges, this was an institution desperately seeking a new role.

Teacher Education had been culled nationally in 1975. Those Teacher Training colleges that survived did so only by merging and undertaking to expand into Honours degrees in the arts and humanities validated by the newly formed Council for National Academic Awards (the CNAA).

WISHE's first non-teacher education CNAA validated degree was in History with Education in 1977, its second a year or two later was, English with Religious Studies.

Those staff that could, left with good compensation packages, those that stayed often resented the process of change, some pretended it had not happened and tried to carry on as usual. Old enmities between the colleges continued and found new forms of expression by challenging the need for change.

New staff, like me and Bill, came in to teach the new non-teacher education programmes for which, at the time, there was no proven market, no history of success and no established national credibility for CNAA degrees. It was by no means certain that these new Institutes of Higher Education would survive long. To choose to teach here was itself a leap of faith.

Don't misunderstand me, the older staff that stayed were actually pretty great. This was the last of the generation that had won the war. They were certain of

their entitlement and they weren't going to be pushed around by anyone. Management took place strictly by consultation and agreement.

It made for a lively, querulous and strangely libertarian environment. While older staff fought old battles, incoming young academics were given full freedom to be creative on the new programmes- because we were the only available experts in those areas. In that sense, it was a good place to be a junior lecturer with far more academic responsibility for the pay grade than was available in more established institutions.

But in my first five years, after arriving in 1976, I often wondered what I had got myself into. That's why Bill's appointment in 1981 was a significant event, both for me and for the institution. Because Bill was the real deal – a genuine academic with all the positives that term can carry.

A native of Glasgow, Bill's academic career took him sequentially to the universities of Oxford, Princeton, Edinburgh and then, - almost seamlessly - to Chichester and Bognor. I remember being deeply impressed by the sheer distance Bill had travelled to get here. But mainly I was impressed by the prestigious nature of the institutions he had experienced. Bill's was a qualitatively different academic pedigree for a member of staff at the Institute.

And his research specialism was perfect. Hermeneutics: which challenged the empirical universe of scientific realism. A perfect academic discourse for an institution in motion and one that sought to establish its academic credentials.

So, from the start, Bill set the bar for what the institution now needed to become.

For me personally, Bill's appointment was good news. It indicated that WISHE really was seriously committed to its future as an academic institution, maybe even committed, at some point, to becoming a university - though I have to say this seemed a long shot in 1981.

But from the early 1980's things started to feel firmer, it felt as if we were moving forward.

As well as Religious Studies, Bill stepped forward to teach on the Related Arts programme that was developed in the late 1980s. Related Arts was a Joint and minor degree programme that explored the intersectionality between Art, Dance, Music and Drama and English.

This programme was seen by the wider staff in the 1990's as somewhere between commendably progressive and fundamentally weird. [*We have some of the staff with us here today who taught on this programme – you know who you are!!*]. But Bill was perfectly at home with fluid curriculum boundaries, in fact, he sought them in his teaching and his research.

This commitment to crossing curriculum boundaries was reflected in his easy transition, in 2001, to the Department of English and Creative Writing, at which point he further developed his research interest into Children's Fantasy literature.

Our paths crossed many times as young - and increasingly - not so young colleagues. We interviewed students together, sat on early quality assurance panels, reported to exam boards, moved inexorably through the joys of unitisation, modularisation and semesterisation and drank gallons of coffee in the Common Room.

As the institution adopted the formal evaluation of its courses in the 1990s, it became clear that Bill was a leading part of that cadre of excellent teachers at what was now Chichester Institute of Higher Education, whose commitment to student learning would, from 2005 onwards, be reflected in outstanding retention and National Student Survey outcomes. The work of these staff enabled the University to confound widespread expectations for a small university and establishing a national reputation for teaching and student support.

Bill was passionate about the democratisation of Higher Education. Growing up in Parkhead in the East End of Glasgow, his commitment to widening participation and the transformative power of education was a tenet of faith. People like Bill made the University of Chichester.

From my many memories of Bill, one stands out most clearly for me.

It was 2002, we were now University College Chichester. We had lost a Head of English and Creative Writing and, for various reasons we couldn't seem to appoint a replacement. Bill stepped forward and offered to fill in temporarily along with his long-time colleague and fellow-Scot, Isla Duncan.

They were both clear that neither had ambitions to take up the role permanently but they could see we were in a fix and were happy to help out for a specified period. These days we would call it would probably be called an 'acting-up job share' but the term was not really in usage at the time. But it was seen as an unusual step and there were those who argued that it would all end in tears.

In the acknowledgements to his superb book *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life*, published shortly after this in 2004, Bill thanked Isla for all her support, noting cryptically that they, [quote] '*shared the Acting Headship during interesting times*'.

I was closely involved with them throughout this period, as I now had responsibility for quality assurance, and the experiment was a complete success. They may have taken up their joint role reluctantly but they gave an object lesson to us all in how to operate as a team. I still remember it as a wonderful example of humane leadership.

It has to be said that their approach fell well outside, what might be called, accepted managerialist practice but it was all the better for that. Bill contributed his characteristic blend of gentleness, firmness, resilience and administrative efficiency to the pair's careful steering of the Department in a difficult period.

These were personal skills that would again be evident in the success of the Sussex Centre for Folklore, Fairy Tales and Fantasy, which Bill established in 2009. Others will speak of the significance of Bill's research and his many publications. I was certainly delighted to be a member of the Panel that awarded Bill his well-merited Chair in Literary History and Hermeneutics in 2008.

For the developing institution, (from 2005 we were the 'University of Chichester' with taught degree awarding powers) Bill's research work (and that of others like him) was of critical importance. Because *research credibility* was, and remains, the key to *institutional credibility* for any Modern University.

For Chichester to make the move to full University status required achieving not only taught degree awarding powers but also research degree awarding powers, which were not secured until 2015. Bill's idea for the Sussex Centre, in 2009, was exactly right for a small institution that sought international

recognition for research into academic areas that were both specific and innovative.

The Sussex Centre was one of a number of initiatives, which emerged from the ground up at this time, that came from staff and which reflected that same challenge to be creative that had characterised those early years of the institution.

Research initiatives, like the Sussex Centre, provided an international profile for Chichester's research. This not only secured Degree Awarding Powers in 2015 and good scores in the periodic Research Assessment exercises. But more than this, the success of projects like the Sussex Centre actively impacted on the national perception of small universities. And this changed the conversation about what constituted a 'good' university.

In 2011, as VC, I wrote formally to Bill on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his arrival at WISHE, thanking him for his enormous contribution to the institution he had served for three decades.

In a characteristically generous note by way of response, he explained why he had stayed so long. Having served 35 years myself by then, I recognised that need to clarify that longevity of service should in no way be mistaken for lack of imagination.

Bill explained that he loved working in a collegial institution that was student-focussed and which shared his active commitment to widening participation and the transformative role of education. He summed up his feelings about Chichester in a single word: his word, '*whatsnottolike?*'.

So, I think we should remind ourselves that today we are not only celebrating the life of a wonderful teacher, researcher and colleague, who was taken from us suddenly by a cruel illness in 2016. We are also celebrating a founder of this University.