



REMEMBERING JOHN FINEL 1944 – 2006

John was for over 25 years Treasurer of Shap, but also an initiator, encourager and supporter of many other aspects of the Working Party's activity. His name may not be widely known among readers of this Journal, for John was one of those people who worked quietly and efficiently, enabling others to go ahead with new projects, whilst offering timely words of advice when needed. In tribute to John, we asked some past and present members of Shap to contribute their personal memories of him:

John Finel — Man of Quality, Shiner of Lights

Before ever the Shap Working Party existed, even when it was just a seminal thought in the creative minds of a handful of pundits in the North East of England, John Finel was active in the field of world religions, beavering away in his classrooms to open windows and letting in the light into the minds of young people, who came to learn through him that religions are different, varied and intriguing.

So for more than forty years John had an important and significant influence on the classroom development of the exploration of world religions with teenagers. And as with everything he touched, John was efficient, thorough and perceptive. His promotion through the school hierarchy is testimonial to the qualities he had in ample supply, first as organiser and supporter, but also as the master of relationship skills and bringing out qualities in others, which they never knew they had.

He had a fund of stories, an earthy laugh, an impatience with fools (of which we naturally had our share) and the ability to ensure that the Working Party never lost its head in the clouds or became remote from what he saw as its initial function vis-à-vis the school situation. The dearth of practising schoolteachers in our ranks was largely offset by the quality of those we had, with John at the forefront.

Of course John's work for and in the Shap Working Party is chiefly remarkable for his role as Shap Treasurer. But he was also important because of the succinct way he had of summarising an argument and uniting the protagonists of two warring positions by showing that they were unwittingly saying the same things, only in different ways — inhabiting and articulating from different premises, so to speak. He also, more than anyone else I can think of in the Working Party, made occasion to speak to every member at every meeting, ensuring that all felt welcome and had a role to play - as well of course as expenses to claim!

As Treasurer and expositor of accounts and financial positions, John was meticulous and indefatigable. In the early stages of his role, when payments of thirty pence were customary, John received hundreds of cheques each year in batches of fifty or so by post, and he, together with his equally efficient wife, entered every one with full details in his recording system to ensure that none were lost or overlooked; and he always knew exactly



where we stood financially, even when the different fiscal years he was forced to work with made this a seemingly complex matter to explain. John saw his role not so much as gathering in our vital income as ensuring that it was spent, and in the best ways possible.

He set out to facilitate, not to restrict expenditure, but also ensured that it was spent on important projects. He was always receptive to suggestions, and exceptional at evaluating and prioritising them.

And even though, because of the nature of his role as Treasurer, John always declined the role of Chair of Shap, his influence as the longest standing of any officer of the Working Party ensured that there was constant continuity available to our rotating Chairpersons and our fluctuating Secretaries. Shap must have had twenty Chairs and seven Secretaries, but only three Treasurers, and none to hold a candle to John. Perhaps the lighting of a candle to show us where we have been and where we need to go has to be the ultimate image in our remembrances of John Finel.

Peter Woodward

John Finel was a founder member of the Shap Working Party whom I first met at the Lake District hotel on Shap fell from which we decided to name ourselves. He was a comprehensive school teacher and a Yorkshireman. The small group of pioneers in the field of encouraging a new, world religions approach to RE soon came to value his realism and commonsense. When we decided to publish a booklet, World Religions for CSE or 16 Plus, John chaired the group that prepared it and he edited the resulting publication; that many teachers found the publication of value was in no small measure the consequence of John's skills in writing clearly and persuasively.

When John became a head teacher he suggested that he might leave the Working Party, being no longer involved in the teaching of RE. It was not sentiment, but the recognition by his colleagues that he could now bring even wider insights to bear on the subject, that persuaded him to remain a member - but on condition that he might continue to work by filling the Treasurer's post. This he did with skill and in a manner not always found in that class! John believed that money should be used, wisely, of course, and that bills should be paid promptly. His wife, Jennifer, surely helped him to ensure that a request for payment received one day, was responded to by first post on the next!

John was a reliable member of the Working Party, but more than that, he was a loyal friend, a kindly man, and someone it was a pleasure to be with. He was a true Yorkshireman in whom there was no guile. I only wish I had known him as a head teacher, especially welcoming — or saying farewell to — Ofsted inspectors; and to his colleagues, 'They've gone. Bring out the ale'!

W. Owen Cole

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



In the early years of Shap, there was a sense of adventure in breaking new ground in the field of Religious Studies. With that went a camaraderie among the members as happens with all those who work together in a common cause. Firm friendships were formed between people who only saw each other two or three times a year. Indeed Chairpersons often found it difficult to get business meetings under way because of the many personal exchanges being prolonged!

So it is that John Finel became my friend over year upon year of meeting together. It was an aspect of Shap that he appreciated and enjoyed - and did much to maintain. John represented a constituency that was always difficult to sustain, viz, representation from schools. He would frequently remind our distinguished academics of the realities of teaching in school! He was immensely proud of World Religions for CSE or 16 Plus produced at a time when we were trying to encourage regional groups to form and initiate projects; John's group produced this. It would not have appeared without his application and persistence.

Shap came near to foundering when it lost the modest sponsorship which sustained it in the beginning. It was in large measure due to John that we slowly established our own self-funding by selling our calendar and mailing instead of giving them away! Shap owes him a great debt of gratitude for his service as Treasurer for so many years. We all felt secure about the care of our finances while under John's administration.

I remember John with great affection as the most reliable of friends. He represented for me integrity, which is the essence of the good life.

Rest in peace, John.

John Rankin

John Finel's energies for secondary education were constant and plentiful. This was equally true for what he gave to Shap. Initially he came in as an enthusiast for secondary RE teaching, as an associate teacher with the development work of the Schools Council Secondary RE Project directed by Ninian, as also by his presence at Shap Conferences. That enthusiasm took him on Shap forays to N Ireland and to Germany in the interest of promoting world religions in education. That Euro-Shap (EAWRE) emerged and thrives, but not any N Ireland equivalent, is no reflection on John's sense of humour. That was dry and wry, like the whisky he enjoyed there!. Once he had taken on the role of Shap Treasurer, it was clear that all income would be safely garnered and spending prudently regulated. It was.

Brian Gates

John Finel: a light in my life

One of the heart-warming features of the Shap Working Party is that it is made up of teachers and academics who, though brilliant in their chosen field, have difficulty organising

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things - not least themselves. John brought some light and order to the scene. He held the purse, gripped it even, for all my years on Shap until I took over from him as Treasurer. In those years Shap changed from being an organisation which one paid to join and paid all one's own expenses to being an organisation on a solid financial footing - largely due to John's (generally) good humoured guidance.

He had a wry sense of humour touched by realism, while still being able to see the Shap vision. He was able to establish clear objectives and not lose sight of them and the continued success of Shap owed much to John's business sense. He was passionate about Shap taking new initiatives and warned that Shap would ossify without new people, particularly those who earned their living in the classroom.

One could understand how he would be able to run a large and highly successful school for, alongside his business acumen, he was a kind, genuine and thoughtful man; one to whom I warmed. His feet remained firmly on the ground, his hand firmly around the (Shap) purse and his heart full of compassion for those who needed support and help.

At the heart of the man was his smile, his warmth and his ability to reach out to people and he brought a bright light to my life and to the lives of others. He was a man with a deep faith that had a practical outcome: he wanted to make the world a better place. I looked forward to seeing him and enjoyed our infrequent times together. He was a good friend and I do, and will continue to, miss him.

Alan Brown

Like other colleagues, I shall remember John's care for detail, his humour and dependability — he was simply always 'there' at Shap, carefully listening, and helping us to negotiate the crosscurrents of debate on many an occasion. But of course John had a life beyond Shap. He was a respected Headteacher; beyond the administrative skills required for the successful management of the large community school which he led, he cared passionately about young people both in and out of school; he was part of and contributed to the life of the local church in Stokesley and supported work with young people there. He valued the love and mutual support within his family.

At John's funeral I discovered that as a young lad growing up in Yorkshire John had learnt the art of grafting roses; a task demanding skill, care and patience to bring plants to bloom and to fruition — the same qualities our 'rememberings' tell of John. Roses — found in all countries and cultures in the northern hemisphere, and with an ancestry of three millennia - may stand also for the living faiths to whose understanding John was committed. We are grateful that he expressed this commitment through his long service to Shap.

Mary Hayward

To John's family — Jennifer, Richard, and Kathryn and Richard — we send our condolences, and join with them in remembering John.