

Memories of Nick Bomford Headmaster of Uppingham 1982 to 1991



Born 27th January 1939

Educated at Kelly College

Trinity College Oxford. MA Modern History

1960 to 1966 Lecturer at Dartmouth

1966 to 1976 Taught at Wellington College

Headmaster of Monmouth 1977 to 1982

Headmaster of Harrow School 1991 to 1999

Died 21st June 2025

Toby Butterfield (F 79)

I was lucky enough to be Vice Captain of School in the spring and summer terms of the Quatercentenary year 1984, and then Captain of School for Autumn Term 1984, when the Queen and Prince Phillip visited. I was honoured to be chosen to greet them and give them a welcome speech in the Great Hall, culminating in the (apparently traditional!) Uppingham "four cheers." I remember too, as I'm sure Gilly does, how understandably proud the Headmaster was to entertain the Royal Visitors (in his study, as I recall), and the meticulous plans he made and executed for that occasion, including the planting of the tree next to the staff room.

All of it made for a thrilling capstone to my career at Uppingham, and I am grateful to Mr. Bomford for his trust in me to discharge my responsibilities that day.

I was present for the memorial service for Peter Colville last winter, and I'm sad that we have now lost both of the leaders and educators who had the most impact on me while I was at Uppingham. Gilly and the whole Bomford family were indeed kind and gracious hosts in the Headmasters House; please pass them my sympathy and best wishes. May his memory be a blessing to all those who knew him.

Johnny Hon (H 85)

I was very sorry to hear of Nick's passing and wanted to send you my heartfelt condolences to the family. He was Headmaster during my time at Uppingham, and I remember him with great admiration and warmth.

Nick had a remarkable ability to connect personally with pupils and was appreciated by all. His genuine interest, quiet strength, and good humour left a lasting impression on many of us. I will always remember his kindness and the sense of calm leadership he brought to the school. Please know that many of us hold his memory in deep regard.

With sympathy and best wishes.

Julian Sykes (SH 86)

All headmasters are revered, especially when you are a new boy or indeed in the first two or three years of school. As a pupil in the late 80s, it was tradition at Uppingham to have the teamsheet signed by the headmaster before it was posted on the noticeboard under the Old School Room.

As a captain of various sports teams throughout my time, I hold very clear and strong memories of waiting outside the headmaster's office to be invited in to have my handwritten teamsheet signed by Mr Bomford. Once in, it felt like an eternity to cross the long study, the creaky floorboards, the wood panelled walls, all echoing as I approached the headmaster's desk, where Mr Bomford would be sitting.

Every time, however, my reverence, fear even, of the headmaster was misplaced as Mr Bomford had the most disarming of smiles and kind words that always put one firmly at ease. He also had that knack of knowing at least a little something about you, your team or how you had performed and as such, you were able to talk with him naturally and honestly.

He was a kind man and symbolised everything that was good about a public school headmaster at that time.

Mike Dodson (B 84)

I am very sorry to hear the news – I have very fond memories of him indeed and got to know him and Gilly fairly well, particularly in my last year at Uppingham when my good friend, Alastair Hutson, and I found ourselves (slightly improbably in my view) as Captain and Vice-Captain of School and so had a good deal of contact with him during our final year at Uppingham.

He was incredibly generous and kind with his time and a very kind, calm, unflustered, cerebral but pragmatic headmaster dealing with the incredibly diverse (and often very tricky issues) that faced a boarding school of that era. What struck me at the time was his willingness to regard all his pupils as individuals and as adults (often in the face of behaviour exactly to the contrary!) and his commitment to ensuring that our time at Uppingham was very much in preparation for our life in the wider world, in the best traditions of schools like Uppingham.

His effect on me as a person and the trust he placed in me (at a time when I probably wouldn't have trusted myself all that much) is something that I very much value and remember. It made my time at Uppingham a positive and fulfilling experience, an experience that remains a part of me to this day and one of the cornerstones of my life.

Some years after leaving Uppingham, I remember receiving a very kind invitation to a dinner to celebrate his retirement from teaching, which I unfortunately couldn't attend due to travelling abroad with work. That was, I think, very typical of Nick's generosity and openness and his interest in the pupils he had taught. I wished then, and now as I write this, that I had been able to go to celebrate such a wonderful career and to thank him for everything that he had done for me.

Please pass on my very best wishes and condolences to Gilly and the whole Bomford family – I am thinking of them all at this difficult time.

Dr. Barney Tinsley (C 88)

Such very sad news to hear about Mr Bomford's passing. He was the Headman for all my five years at Uppingham, and whilst our interactions were relatively infrequent, I recall a very funny episode at the New boys dinner...

I was sat on his right-hand side, feeling incredibly nervous, as I think all the Constables new boys were. Experiencing a cold wet feeling against my right hand, I shot up out of my chair with a scream, much to Mr. Bomford's bemusement! Quickly realising it was his beloved spaniel, I think called Pepper? I was immediately profusely apologetic but, laughing uncontrollably at the same time.

I think this was the icebreaker that the evening needed and remember an enjoyable hour or two after this!

He, and the admin and pastoral teams (including the late, wonderful Gwen Wilcox) were extremely kind, nurturing and understanding whilst my Dad was stationed in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. I was extraordinarily worried about him, but was always allowed to go and spend a bit of time in Gwen's office, and saw him pop in from time to time. He always asked after my Dad, and if I was okay. A really good man.

David Prince – Former Staff

Thank you for letting me know the sad news of Nick's death. He was a really kind and caring man who made a considerable contribution to boarding education in his three headmasterships.

I only had two terms with him at Uppingham before we went to Reed's, but we had fairly regular contact, especially when I did my HMC job. We also on occasions bumped into him and Gilly at the theatre in Bath when we were living in Somerset in our retirement.

He will be much missed.

Peter Martin (H 79)

My thoughts are with Gilly and the Bomford family. Nick played a huge part in mine and my cohort's fondest memories from our time at Uppingham, especially the times I spent in his regular company during my tenure as head boy. There will, I am sure, be plenty to celebrate in the OU tribute.

Shamil Thakrar (LH 85)

Honestly, as I think of it, so much of what I have done in life these past decades comes from those forming years at Uppingham and a lot of it specifically from the opportunities that Nick gave me.

I know he saw something in me that I wasn't aware of. I would say that seeing people as he did – not as they are, not even as they are likely to be, but as they could be – is a gift that is both beautiful and generous. He gave me that gift, and for that I'm deeply grateful. No doubt, he would take this in his stride, and receive the compliment humbly.

In my Upper Sixth, I was fortunate to be one of the Vice-Captains of School and used to go and see Nick, with Oliver Black and Dave Howe, most mornings of the week. Those mornings in my last year were so very forming for me. They taught me what it was to step up and contribute, to use intelligence and care to try to help a community to be a better version of itself. Those are lessons I have never forgotten and still inform what I do today. That early experience in life – with Nick – was a key one for me and in many ways created a foundation for a lot of what I have done later in life. For that, I am extremely grateful.

Yousef Khalilieh (B 86)

Please pass my heartfelt deep condolences to Gilly on her loss. I am sure it is hard and she will be in my prayers. I still remember the new comers lunch we had at his residence where we had the most delicious quiche and where he spent time with everyone one of us trying to ease us in and to know us more.

Nic Merrett – Former Staff

Thank you for sending this message and sad news about Nick. I have a great deal to thank him for as he appointed me in the summer holidays of 1989. I had met him at Monmouth on the touch line of a spirited rugby match well before he became Headmaster (I was a spectator in case you get the wrong idea..).

I recall early on in my time at Uppingham he was interested in my plan to take a group of Sixth Formers trekking across Dartmoor covering the shortest day and invited me into his study to lay out the OS map and show him the route – I seem to recall a spaniel helping out too. He knew a lot about Dartmoor from his days teaching at RN College Dartmouth – but he gave me the time – even when the Housemasters were moaning they could not get to see him as he was too busy!

They were a brilliant couple and a true Husband and wife team.

Toby Case (WB 87)

It's such very sad news about Mr Bomford, and he & his family are in my prayers. I had relatively little contact with him, but I remember him attending a West Bank lunch and sitting at my table. Even then I had hopes of travelling and to this day I remember his top tip about visiting the Taj Mahal: a torch! To see the amazing things in corners. When I visited the Taj Mahal in February this year – c 35yrs later – I remembered it!

I also remember collecting my Badminton colours from him. He had a supernatural ability to remember names, and make you feel at ease, as if he'd known you personally for many years. That was truly special and has stuck with me.

Rachel van Zyl (née Park, Fd 87)

I am so sad to hear the news about Mr Bomford. As a young 16-year-old girl (back in 1987!) when I first arrived at Uppingham I felt quite daunted at the prospect of having supper at the house of my headmaster and his wife. However, Mr Bomford and Gilly were so incredibly welcoming and immediately put me at ease – Mr Bomford never 'sat in his ivory tower' and was a fantastic leader and role model. My condolences to his wife and family.

Guy Rowlands (L 82)

In autumn 1986, in my final year at Uppingham, I was the senior pupil librarian working under Brian Matthews. When Brian died, I suddenly had more responsibility thrust on me than was normal and found myself working under Alan Hancock. It was then that I discovered how calm and focussed Nick Bomford – whose headship I had always appreciated – could be, as we sat together in several meetings to chart an interim way forward for the library before Brian's successor could be appointed. It was then that I came to appreciate how much he trusted the final year pupils and how much he valued their input. There was no attempt to patronise or exert rank. He wanted a serious problem solved and his patient guidance over the next seven months was well taken. He seemed to me, from this experience, to be not only a very good manager but also a good man. I have tried to retain memory of this episode as a good example of an approach to leadership and working with others I have tried to follow.

Lucie Burges-Lumsden (née Reynolds, Fd 83)

I am so sorry to hear of the passing of "Sir" and offer my deepest condolences to Gilly and the girls.

He was such a cool headman, and we all loved coming to the legendary dinner parties!

I will never forget them offering to take me to Rockingham Castle for the Saunders-Watson's party on the first night I started at Uppingham. I was way too scared to accept and thought it might set the wrong tone with my housemates but I soon came to realise it was probably the wrong decision.

Throughout my time at Uppingham "Sir" was a huge figure in School life – he was so kind and generous with his time, both he and Gilly always made everybody feel special and capable of achieving anything! It was very special times. He always made you feel like you were the only one he cared about - a very rare talent.

He will be greatly missed.

Nick Royle (F 82)

I remember one Sunday evening in the Summer term I missed Chapel because I had been out with my parents and as we had actually gone home to Essex rather than just having lunch out somewhere near school, we had slightly misjudged the journey time back to school. Also my Mother wasn't well at all, but in those days (1986) cancer wasn't really talked about. Anyway, I was told by my Housemaster to visit the Headmaster on the following Monday morning to apologise for missing Chapel (which seemed a bit unfair as it wasn't really my fault and I couldn't really say why it had happened), but I duly obeyed.

The next morning I went to see the Headmaster, Mr. Bomford at 8.30 or whatever time it was and he welcomed me into his office and started talking about the season's 1st V111 shooting results (as I was in the team) and how things were going. After five minutes or so, he said that he had quite forgotten why I was there but it was nice to see me anyway. I think he started saying something like try not to miss it again, but only very quietly and as I said excuse me Sir, he replied don't worry, and just repeated nice to see you...!

Robin Lewis (M 81)

Feeling very thoughtful regards Nick's passing. A wonderful man first and Headmaster second. His kindness and understanding was pivotal in my development from junior idiot to senior fool. However, Nick and Gilly trusted me enough to accompany the lovely Rebecca to Hong Kong and Thailand, memories which wouldn't have been possible without his trust.

I will never forget the Bomfords!

Adrian Dyter (WB 81)

I was very sorry to hear of Nick's passing. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Uppingham, working very closely with Nick in my final year. I learnt important lessons for life and appreciated our daily interactions, sometimes a few moments to get a team sheet signed, sometimes lengthy discussions about the overall temperature of school life hopefully developing the culture of the year group.

Nick did say to me just before the Routh, of course you will be expecting a good result this week – he had actually got my running prowess mixed up with a good friend Neil Aitken who was always Top 10 whilst I was never quite able to break into the Top 100!!!

Our thoughts are with Gilly and the girls and I hope to be able to join a memorial service in due course.

Harry Spry-Leverton (Fgh 67)

Thank you for passing on this sad news. I do indeed remember Nick Bomford very well, although we only coincided at Uppingham for a year. I was his last appointment to the Common Room during his headmastership and I was always very honoured to be part of the Bomford era. Indeed, it was his thinking that foresaw the need for the appointment of the first professional Librarian to the Staff.

The School Library had for many years been overseen by a semi-retired member of Staff - one thinks of the great Toby Belk or Bryan Matthews - but by the 1980s had become rather moribund and was largely seen as a VI form preserve. Nick Bomford was particularly supportive of me during my first year and I was sorry to see him depart for Harrow. I vividly recall looking around the Common Room in Summer 1991 and thinking that it was a genuinely happy place.

James Watson (L 88)

Looking through my old Uppingham papers, I found some articles in the school (pupil) magazines that were written about him so thought I would include – I not sure whether the "Vox" and "upstart" magazines ever made their way into the archive records Jerry keeps!

Nick was also a strong supporter of shooting at Uppingham having won his own "Blue" at Oxford for shooting, he regularly attended the Ashburton at Bisley and was present even after he left the school to congratulate the winning Uppingham Team (whilst in his position as HM of Harrow). He was an Honorary Life member of UVRC.

James Dutta (WD 86)

Mr Bomford was a very well respected Headmaster, he was always very fair and kind and he had real gravitas. My thoughts are with Mrs Bomford and the family.

Tom Watson (M 90)

Very sorry to hear. Please pass on my condolences.

We'll raise a glass to the great man at the next Melbourne OU get together (possibly in July when the Lions Rugby team are touring).

John Clinton, Former Staff

I was very sorry to learn that Nick Bomford had passed away. He was a lovely man, warm, approachable and a fluent speaker. I will never forget his leading the Memorial Service in the Chapel for Leslie Sellick. His Headmaster's suppers were occasions to really look forward to. Undoubtedly he was the best Headmaster I served under. Our loss was Harrow's gain.

William Cazalet (LH 81)

I recently returned from abroad and was so saddened to learn Nick's passing. He was a huge influence on my developing years and my time at Uppingham; he was tremendously supportive of me, especially in my last year at the school, when there seemed, for an 18 year-old schoolboy, to be so much going on. I recall how thrilled my Ma and Pa (both as parent and trustee) were that he and Gilly would be moving to Uppingham on his appointment as headmaster there, having known you both from Wellington days. My sincerest condolences to the family.

Dan Black (B 87)

I was deeply saddened to hear of Nick's passing.

Nick was an extraordinary headmaster whose warmth and remarkable memory left a lasting impression on all who knew him. His ability to recall every pupil's name, even decades later, was a testament to his genuine care and dedication.

Now, as a parent with children in school, I've come to appreciate even more how vital a headmaster's influence is. Nick's leadership created an atmosphere of inspiration and community that shaped us all. His legacy lives on in the countless lives he touched.

My thoughts are with Gilly and the family. May you find comfort in the memories of his incredible life and the love he shared so generously.

FURTHER COMMENTS SHARED VIA OU SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS**Andrew Fairs (F 85)**

My children have both attended Uppingham because of the experience that my loyal and long term friends had with him as our Headmaster. Being personable, knowing every pupil, finding the best from every pupil... importantly whether it was in academia or extracurricular activities. An open school to find the best from all its pupils! We will also never forget how Gilly must have felt having pollied turning up for coffee in their private house at break on a Thursday with all those muddy feet!... what a special headmaster... Mr Bomford we were very, very lucky to have you. God Bless you and your family for your dedication to making us who we all are.

Nikki Swinfen-Cranney (Member of Staff)

Nick was my Dad's best friend at Oxford and best man at my parents' wedding in 1960, then my eldest sister's godfather. Dad was very upset at his death, as they had remained in touch all these years. He had always said what a lovely person Nick was.

Vicki Murray (J & Fd 85)

I remember my first meeting with him during the scholarship weekend in 1985. He put me at ease straight away. He knew every pupil by name and recalled details years later. He and Gilly were also great hosts during their tenure and my condolences to her and the family.

Chris Sperry (SH 89)

I remember my first morning when he shook each new pupil's hand at the end of Chapel to welcome them. Also the invite to the group dinner at his house as part of meeting new pupils.

Tim Jefferis (Former Staff)

He and Gilly came to Speech Day one year whilst I was teaching at Uppingham. Years had passed by and I was amazed that he knew - completely out of context - exactly who I was and all sort of things about me. I get stumped by names of past pupils who are just a few years out of school! A gentle, kind, humane individual. He will be sorely missed.

Charlie Philip (WB 86)

A top chap who always had our backs - a sad day.
