

To Robert Woodward

There are a lot of us here – I wonder how many of us have experienced the warmth of a good lunch with Robert here in Twickenham or elsewhere. Quite a few, I imagine. You may well be familiar with Robert on the subject of lunch – ‘Have you ever counted how many lunches you have left in life’, he said in an early conversation – 9490. It sounded a lot to me, ‘we must make the most of every one’ he said. Lunch, he went on, is not lunch without a glass of wine – anything less is a snack. I loved it when he was emphatic like that. He also sowed the seed of a joke which amuses me every time I read the word love. Try, if you will, replacing lunch for love in any poem or song you know. ‘Lunch lunch me do’, ‘Lunch lifts us up where we belong’, or the best one Tom ever received from him – “one that lunched not wisely but too well” with the note, “on leaving Montin’s at 4.30”. ‘All you need is lunch’.

Robert founded Art History Abroad with Sarah Carr Gomm and Rodney Portman with the express intention of giving students the most vivid civilised experience of art, by teaching on site in small groups. He didn’t teach for the first few years but when Sarah did persuade him to join in he brought, with Tom, a dimension of literature and, in particular, the romantic poets who visited Rome. He managed to bring history alive in the hearts of students and parents alike, often reducing us to tears in the room where Keats’s died as he read from the letters of Joseph Severn.

As the years passed he massively expanded his range of interest to include many new cities around Italy as well as Istanbul, and Franconia. He brought to bear a life and empathy to history that few scholars can muster. I have been lucky enough to travel with him on many of these adventures. He made a great friend and you always knew it was going to be fun seeing him – even in a bad mood he was funny, such was his range of description – his conversation was unpredictable, often contradictory and always amusing. The only blot was when he called Charlie to ask, in a typical Robert way, that though he richly enjoyed sharing a room with me, he wondered if it would be possible if he could, in some way, no longer share a room with my feet.

Tom reminded me of Robert standing outside the Abruzzi just before a day of English Romantic Poetry in Rome. Smart as ever, something that always drew admiration in Italy, he had one of his interesting looking commonplace books in one hand and his head in the other. He went on to talk about the magnificence of the baths of Caracalla, its great halls and libraries and the noble sentiment of cleanliness and learning – one could sense his students were not sure where he was going with this one until his conclusion - the demise of the baths, with great chunks of masonry crashing to the ground was not unlike his brain at that very moment, he said, so grievous was his hangover.

He would then march off with the students to buy the most wonderful picnic to be eaten somewhere suggestive, like the Palatine while reading Byron. All in a day with Robert was a heady mix of history, poetry, art, sentiment, empathy, delicious food and hiccup, even the choosing of flowers for Keats’ grave was a careful pleasure. And much as he had a melancholy about death, it seems that this spurred him to make the most of life. – this is Roberts inspiring legacy and anyone taught by him or with him

has been so lucky. To the now dozens of AHA tutors he was venerable, avuncular, slightly frightening but always charming, inspiration.

Sensitive, or *sensibile* in Italian, Robert may have been, but sensible he was not. I shudder to remember a hideously late party in a student's room in the Abruzzi, it was the early days of portable speakers and the stones had just come on in the middle of the night, when Robert burst into the room in full Mick Jagger, hips one way, chest the other, strutting, pouting, he was magnificent. Ernesto, the night porter was not far behind him. As Ernesto opened the door, Robert, faster than a striking mamba, leaped across the room and before Ernesto was himself in the room, and we were all caught red handed, Robert was already in a bed, covered with a blanket, curly hair poking above it, as if asleep.

I, we, are so grateful for his life and grateful to Rosemary and the family for sharing him. Life will be a paler thing Many of us have kept his letters and his watercolours are prized all around, more because they are Robert's, than the wonderful things they depict.

And so to the Colosseum and the informal club by that name of those who have climbed into that great edifice at night. There are family in its number, architects, directors, artists, teachers a tramp and one churchman. To some it might seem just an impish prank to sneak through the shadows of the Colosseum, avoiding the smoking guards on the terraces above – but to Robert and Tom that first night it was to make real the romantic attitude of Byron and to bring the building to life. So imagine, if you will, Robert and Tom climbing the scaffolding to read by the light of a lighter these lines sitting where Byron had once sat upon the Emperor's seat.

- Nick Ross, St Mary's Church, Twickenham, Tuesday, 18th November 2008

But when the rising moon begins to climb
Its topmost arch and gently pauses there
When the stars twinkle through the loops of time
And the low night breeze waves along the air

The garland forest which the grey walls wear
Like laurels on the bald first Caesar's head;
When the light shines serene but doth not glare,
Then in this magic circle raise the dead
Heroes have trod this spot!
Tis on their dust ye tread.

Lord Byron, Childe Harold Canto IV
Read by Tom Parsons