

Ken Charrot

Having had the distinction of obtaining Exhibitions at both Cambridge and Oxford Universities, Ken completed his degree and a Diploma in Education at Downing College Cambridge in July 1939 before taking up a position as Head of Chemistry at Beal Grammar School for Boys, Ilford, just prior to the school's evacuation to Ipswich at the outbreak of war on 3rd September.

Although teaching was a reserved occupation Ken managed to wangle a release to join the Royal Signals and, after basic training, was sent to Officer Cadet Training Unit in Prestatyn, North Wales, before joining the Divisional HQ Signals Unit of 3rd (Guards) Division based around Bristol. In early 1943 he was posted to Nigeria, where a new formation, 81st (West African) Division, was being raised from volunteers in the then colonies of The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Nigeria for service in the Far East against the advancing Japanese. The Division spent two long periods in the Kaladan Valley of Burma supplied purely by air drop, and as a Coding Officer for the Divisional HQ Signals Ken was Mentioned in Despatches for devising an effective system for the ordering of standardised payloads containing the necessary supplies for the entire division. By the end of the conflict in August 1945 he was second in command of the Divisional HQ Signals with the rank of Major.

Ken returned to Ilford and his previous job in early 1946, and played football for Thurrock Athletic and cricket for both Ilford and, occasionally, Essex 2nd XI. In 1950 he applied successfully to Woodbridge to teach Chemistry as Head of Science, a position he took up in January 1951. The following year he was appointed as Second Master, a role he held until his retirement in 1981.

During that time he also served as Acting Headmaster for virtually the entire academic year (but without giving up his teaching commitments) during the illnesses of two Headmasters, was the Honorary Auditor for the Scout Troop, President of the Scientific Society and of the Photographic Club, and was responsible for the initial formation of the school golf team. His own golf was of modest standard apart from putting, at which he excelled. An above-average cricketer, a superb gully fielder and a reliable opening bat, he played regularly for Campsea Ashe and for the Gentlemen of Suffolk, and for matches on the School cricket pitch alone had a batting average in excess of 50. This did not however prevent him from accompanying school teams for rugby, hockey and of course cricket to all parts of East Anglia or from imparting suitable pithy but constructive comments to his team charges.

Apart from teaching and sport, Ken and his late wife Vera were the long-standing makeup artistes for a succession of school productions. Vera was also involved in the checking – by hand – of the teaching timetable for the entire new school year drawn up and devised by Ken in a frantic two-week session immediately following the end of each summer term. The use of computer programming, spreadsheets and the like was of course totally unknown at that stage. Ken also acted as an Examiner for the Cambridge Examination Board, marking 'O' Level papers from overseas applicants, and after being appointed as one of their two Team Leaders for Physics was involved in the setting of examination papers. In 1971 and again in 1973 he was asked by the Board to join a team going to India to assist in the formation and training of a similar Board by the Indian education authorities.

In his last few years of teaching Ken was instrumental in providing what he called citizenship classes to the Sixth Form, covering everything from Income Tax and National Insurance to Mortgages and Pension Provision, plus much in between. With the admission of girls in 1974 this extended to the production in the school labs of soaps, hand creams, makeup and perfumes, to the amazement and delight of all concerned, and to add to the infamous 'treacle tin experiment' with which he was always associated (for the uninitiated this involved the filling of a treacle tin with laboratory gas and its subsequent ignition whilst resting on a tripod stand – the resulting explosion of the unstable gas/air mixture was notorious in causing panic in adjoining classrooms as well as ruining the decoration of the Chemistry lab ceiling!)

Following retirement in 1981 Ken continued to play golf, to act as a Steward at the Woodbridge Museum, as a server and sidesman at St Mary's Church, and discovered a new passion for the architecture and heraldry of Suffolk churches, giving talks on the subject illustrated with his own slides to clubs and societies far and wide. He also volunteered to assist with the cataloguing and indexing of local newspapers for the Ipswich Museum. Until Vera's death in 2004, after 64 years of marriage, they continued to travel on the Continent, often combining their trip with some more genealogical research into the Swiss origins of the Charrot family tree. They also delighted in seeing more of their two grand-daughters and in attending many of the OW functions and sporting meetings. In 2005 Ken, accompanied by his son Geoffrey, joined eight other former wartime colleagues in re-visiting Burma and the Kaladan Valley, a trip that he found both memorable and poignant in equal measure. He also paid his first visit to the USA to meet other Charrot relatives.

In 2007 Ken was finally persuaded that, at the age of 91, it would be better if he moved into sheltered accommodation in the Seckford Almshouses in Woodbridge, where he spent over three happy years enjoying exemplary care. However a succession of falls and other problems during 2011, followed by hospitalisation, led to the reluctant conclusion in November 2011 that he required full-time nursing care. A suitable home was located in Felixstowe, but sadly his condition deteriorated very rapidly: he died peacefully on 14 January.

For details of the funeral arrangements please see The Daily Telegraph and the local press.

Geoff Charrot (01394 382 433)