

An unforgettable English and History teacher

"Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall," screamed Phyllis Davis, claspng her ample, angora-clad bosom with one hand while holding her well-thumbed copy of Macbeth in the other.

An unforgettable moment from an unforgettable English and history teacher who transformed the lives of all those her talents touched - a nugget of pure gold buried in the unlikely soil of an overcrowded and underfunded secondary modern school during the austere post-war years.

Her infatuation with her chosen subjects was as infectious as the Great Plague - which, with other seminal events and characters from the nation's past, she brought vividly to life - proclaiming loudly while she paced the wooden boards of our classroom as if it were the stage of the Old Vic.

She selflessly fanned the smallest literary spark, scrawling encouraging marks in red ink across our essays and reading her pick of them out loud as the authors sat and blushed with ill-concealed pride.

It was Miss Davis who formed the unforgettably named Spondon House Parent Teacher Junior Dramatic Society and commandeered the canteen for performances of the period plays that flowed from her fertile imagination on to the pages of school exercise books.

We dutifully swapped our grey flannels for Elizabeth doublet and hose and dirndl skirts for Georgian ballgowns, made our own scenery and lighting, and performed on a home-made stage of wooden pallets donated by a local brewery at the behest of our indefatigable producer/director/writer/prompt and general dogsbody.

With school days almost over, Miss Davis stepped in to save me from becoming factory fodder. She persuaded my hard-up mother to let me stay on for an extra year so she could coach me to become the first secondary modern school child in the county to sit GCE 'O' Levels in English as an external candidate..

The gamble paid off. I scraped through the tests and my ever-resourceful tutor bullied a local newspaper editor into granting me my first break in a journalistic career that was to last a lifetime.

To my undying shame, I never did properly thank this wonderful lady for the flying start in life she gave me. Along with the old school, she is now a part of the history which so fascinated and inspired her - and us.

I earnestly hope, dear Miss Davis, that this belated and inadequate little tribute somehow reaches you - and that, in assessing its merits, you will be as generous as always with that red-ink pen.



elbowgrease [17 July 2014 4:52pm](#)