E&S 25/1/23

POILE

Alexander Gordon

(Alex)

Sadly passed away January 3, 2023, aged 75 years.

Remembered with love.

Funeral Service to be held at St Michaels & All Angels Church, Tettenhall on Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 12.45pm followed by Burial at Danescourt Cemetery.

On route to the Church, the Funeral Cortege and motorcycle procession will pass and pause at Tettenhall College.

All local Motorcyclists are asked to contact the Funeral Directors if they wish to participate in the procession which will be leaving Roy Quinton's, School Road, Tettenhall at approximately 12.15pm.

Donations gratefully accepted for Cure Parkinson's and Wolverhampton M S Therapy Centre.

All inquiries to

ROY QUINTON

Funeral Directors

01902 744444

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EULOGY FOR ALEX POILE

Alex was born on 1st December, 1947, in Folkestone, where his father ran a fruit and vegetable shop. On his Austrian mother's side, he came from distinguished stock: his grandfather had served as an ambassador in the Austrian diplomatic service.

Alex was proud of his Austrian connections but it was his native Kent, the Garden of England with its proximity to the sea — the playground of his early years — that set his young mind on fire with a love of nature and the outdoor world.

He maintained an abiding affection for Folkestone and every autumn he would return to his roots. He would boast that the

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inhabitants of the old town were noted for their good manners. Alex was a worthy ambassador of Folkestone in this regard and was especially chivalrous in the presence of ladies – a gentleman to his fingertips.

A gifted artist, he attended the local Art School in Folkestone and embarked on a career as a commercial artist. This work took him to America and, nearer home, to the Pebble Mill Television Studios in Birmingham, where he worked on the set of 'Crossroads', a very popular T.V. soap in the 1960s and 1970s. By this time, he was married to Valerie and had a daughter Nanette.

Art was not his only passion. A man

of many parts with refined tastes, practical, yet cultured and well-read, he relished life on many levels. A cursory glance at his own collection of books would reveal the breadth of his interests, particularly his love of history. Historical artefacts, rather than ornaments, complemented the furnishings of his home at Tekkenhall College: ancient helmets, armour, weaponry and so forth. In that rather cramped space, you could easily bump into, or rub shoulders with, an armoured Roundhead.

On the practical level, he was always building something: anything from a nesting box to a tractor shed. Tinkering with motorbikes was an absorbing preoccupation, and he was very proud of his own machine.

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Witnessing Alex negotiating, at high speed, the narrow streets of Tettenhall village on his quad bike was a sight to behold. It was his wish that 'bikers' should lead the cortège at his funeral, and we thank them for their attendance today.

Alex was a well-known and well-liked character in Tettenhall village. He was acquainted with a great many of the shopkeepers, some of whom were good friends. He felt very much a part of village life here. Years ago, the now-defunct 'Tettenhall Digest', a monthly newspaper, would appear, in which Alex would skilfully write a regular article in his erudite style, embellished by one of his delightful sketches. He produced

numerous pen-and-ink drawings of the village, three of which appear in Geoffrey Hancock's 'A Tettenhall History'. Such was Alex's close association with village life, he conducted, for some years, guided walks around Tettenhall, tracing the village's unique history. Many villagers were invited by him to exercise their dogs on the College site. This led him to run dog-training classes for villagers and people further afield. He was very much a hands-on, people-person.

The rest of my appreciation of Alex's life is dominated by the place he came to love, above all other places, his paradise on earth, and on which place his unswerving devotion remained focused

for the rest of his life.

One day, in May 1977, a twenty-nine-year-old man walked through the gates of Tettenhall College, looking for a job. It so happened that there was a vacancy: the College was looking for a groundsman. He made a bid for the job. It was a risky venture for both him and the College, as he could not claim any experience in this sphere. He was put on a five-day trial and passed with flying colours, remaining at the College for 36 years.

During Alex's long tenure at the school, he demonstrated, in full measure, a life of powerful energy and tremendous industry,

combined with untiring enthusiasm and unfettered imagination. For him, Tettenhall College was not a job: it was a vocation, a calling, for which there were not enough hours in the day. In addition, he also undertook the roles of Head Gardener and Caretaker, an onerous job specification, yet one which he carried with a light-hearted touch and exemplary commitment.

As groundsman, Alex took great pride in his job. Self-indulgence apart, his overwhelming priority was to benefit the College and its pupils. In those early days, I believe, he thought that T.C. was under-selling itself: he was really the first person to realise the potential of the school site as

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a selling-point in its marketing strategy. Prospective parents could, he thought, be enchanted by a beautiful environment, as well as academic and sporting considerations. And so he set about taming and manicuring wild areas and creating woodland walks. The 7 acres of woodland were cleared of tangled undergrowth and an extensive programme of tree-planting was undertaken. Within a few years, the entire College site was transformed and Alex was the driving-force and the man of creative ideas.

Occasionally, there would be a spat with a bursar – he worked under 5 of them. Among school officers, bursars are not always a lovable breed: they are forced to keep a tight rein on finances – too tight for some – implement unpopular

economies and turn a deaf ear to appeals for more money. Alex, independent-minded, would clash with them but relationships were soon repaired without any lingering ill-will on either side. Alex may well have endorsed that comment by an Eton headmaster who declared:

'It has been said that the first act of any headmaster who wishes to ingratiate himself with his staff should be to sack the bursar'.

When money was tight, Alex could always rely on John Chown's legendary generosity, and frequently he dipped into his own pocket.

Once again, with an eye for a good marketing ploy, Alex was a great believer in opening the school gates to the public and making the College more widely known. To achieve this, he planned on the grand scale, and hundreds of people would descend on the College.

There were hosts of events, including Bluebell Walks, Autumn Leaves, Steam Rallies and so forth. He created a well-used cross-country course, which was open to outsiders as well as College pupils, and doctors from New Cross Hospital were invited to use the cricket facilities, as were other groups. Here, again, Alex was breaking new ground.

It was his enthusiasm for history that drew him to an appreciation of The Towers building, purchased by the College in 1944. The Thorneycroft family had been the long-standing residents of the old house and Colonel Thorneycroft, a Victorian eccentric, its leading light. On Open Days, Alex would assemble his extensive Thorneycroft archive

and treat visitors to an appreciation of the Colonel and his home. The Towers was said to be haunted and, from time to time, Alex would host 'ghost evenings' within its walls. He loved that quirky building, albeit a bursar's nightmare with its leaking roof and bizarre plumbing.

He loved his dogs, too, but canine friends were not the only animals on-site to attract pupils and introduce them to more exotic creatures. Behind the Jacks Building and at the side of The Towers, Alex established a Pets' Corner – a varied menagerie, ranging from rats to a Shetland pony. It proved to be a very popular attraction.

He was endowed with an uncanny ability to engage the minds of young people and perceive what enthused them. In that sense, he possessed the mark of the teacher.

His own enthusiasm was infectious and his knowledge carefully researched, but occasionally flavoured with a touch of imagination. He was a genial, outgoing person who earnestly sought to open children's minds to the wonders of nature. He was always ALEX and never Mr. Poile. Standing on ceremony was alien to his nature.

Many a homesick boarder found a friend in Alex, who would take the youngster under his wing and find him a job to do. The Towers Lodge, his home at the school gate, was open-house to all and sundry. At weekends, Alex would take time off from his busy schedule to transport boarders to places of interest in the locality. He never sought popularity among the student body but won it effortlessly by dint of his generous spirit and friendly nature.

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He was very popular among the parent body. If a parent required a tree to be pollarded, a consignment of logs or a box of planks, Alex would readily oblige. He was a welcoming face at the College gate, a constant presence, a helping hand.

He was a very good friend to the Old Tettenhallians' Club and did much to support our annual summer reunion. In recognition of his services to the Club, he was appointed an honorary member. We thought a great deal of him.

Alex imbibed the spirit and the history of the College, which became built into him. He had a huge impact on the place. Among the 'gallery of greats' who served the school with distinction – Bantock, Pond, Pine, Theobald,

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Hancock, Chown, to name a few – I believe that Alex may well have earned his place in that august company. He was certainly an institution in his own right.

Parkinson's Disease was a cruel tormentor to someone of Alex's energy but it never robbed him of his spirit or his fortitude in the face of adversity. His positivity shone through. He was helped along the way by Lesley and her team at Abbeyfield House and then the carers at Wroltesley Park House Care Home. Both places dispensed kindness and compassion in generous measure, as well as effective care. He was a very popular resident in the two homes.

Bill and Brenda Jevons have been the most marvellous friends and tireless visitors. Paul Holt kindly took Alex to his dental appointments, Jane Hancher has devoted

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many hours to managing his finances, Hazel has been a loyal and caring friend and, so too, Mark Leighton. Alex attracted strong loyalties.

He has left us in the physical sense but his fingerprints and footprints are etched on the College landscape, his trees an enduring memorial; and the memory of him lives on in the affection of generations of the Tettenhall College family— pupils, parents and staff, as well as village folk— those who were touched by his influence and his vital presence.

God bless him. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Jeremy Walters
January 2023

ALEX POILE : 1st Dec., 1947 - 3rd Jan., 2023.
T.C. 1977 - 2013 (College Groundsman)