

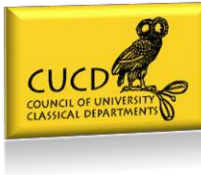
Jonathan Coulston (1957–2024)

by Roger Rees



On 6th July 2024 the School of Classics at St Andrews was delivered a shocking blow by the death of Jon Coulston, shortly after a devastating diagnosis. It was his 67th birthday the day before.

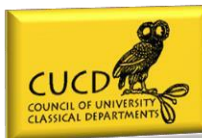
Jon was born in Bath on 5th July 1957. After schooling in Dorset, he went to Leicester University where his History degree included courses in Archaeology and Art History, and a life-long passion was sparked. Jon went on to an MPhil and then PhD (1989) at Newcastle, where his research focussed on the iconography of Trajan's Column. Over the decades that followed, Jon's expertise on the monument was in regular demand in the UK, Italy and elsewhere, for both academic and heritage audiences; so too his



status became established as a world-leading figure in Roman military history in its many forms. In the early 1990s Jon undertook various teaching and research roles in Newcastle and Hadrian's Wall sites; he also featured on the teaching team for courses at the British School at Rome. A later colleague, then a student on one such course, recalls how Jon generated a 'great atmosphere for us, imparted so much knowledge and made the experience truly memorable. I particularly remember how keen Jon was that we understood the significance and work of Gramsci (connected to the street name of the BSR). This always impressed me, showing Jon's broader appreciation of Italian history and of wider values.' In 1993 with his friend Mike Bishop, Jon published *Roman Military Equipment* which immediately became the leading reference book in the field and went to a second edition in 2006. A third is in hand.

Jon was appointed lecturer in Ancient History at St Andrews in 1995 and was promoted to Senior lecturer in 2019. His research continued to focus on technical and cultural aspects of ancient war and warfare, including inscriptions, artefacts and artistic representations. He published dozens of articles and papers and continued to be very busy in outreach and what was to end up being called 'Impact'. For years, a constant companion on Jon's many classical site visits throughout Italy, Greece, Germany, France, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, was Hazel Dodge, also a Roman historian with research expertise in material evidence. Jon and Hazel had met at Newcastle; they married in September 2000, by which point Hazel was in post at TCD. Jon and Hazel set up their homes in Dublin and St Andrews; later they moved from St Andrews to Cupar, where they indulged their love of wildlife together. In 2000 Jon and Hazel published *Ancient Rome. The Archaeology of the Eternal City*.

The St Andrews School of Classics (or of Greek, Latin and Ancient History, as it was then) was much smaller in the 90s than it is now and there were few early career staff or research students. Jon became the natural hub of a network of kindness and support for such colleagues and remained so through his decades of continuous service. Ultimately, he became the 'father of the School'. A colleague fondly remembers how solicitous and generous Jon was when they had first arrived at St Andrews to be presented with a very big teaching workload and pressure to finish a

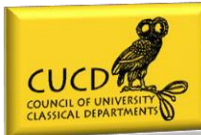


book for the RAE (now REF). Another notes that Jon was an extremely kind, welcoming, and supportive colleague, who reliably brought a solid dose of good cheer to every occasion. Invitations from Jon for a drink or dinner or a movie night were commonplace. (Jon's chat about films was no less interesting and entertaining than his chat about ancient military matters). He was convivial, full of bonhomie, and helped people find their feet.

For many years Jon was the University representative on the Tayside Military Education Committee, and through that made many connections in the MoD in Scotland. Other outreach work included appearances on popular History shows in the UK and Canada, writing for the *National Geographic*, and talks to secondary school students and to military re-enactment groups, among whom he had legendary status. Under Jon's leadership, St Andrews hosted the conference for the *Journal of Roman Military Equipment* in 2016, which memorably featured a full-scale Roman cavalry display on the North Haugh grass.

Jon's learning was immense, hard won through decades of voracious reading and extraordinary recall of detail. His expertise ranged from classical antiquity to Steppe nomads to nineteenth-century cavalry to twentieth-century trench warfare tactics to the Nazi occupation of France and the low countries and to the historical novels of Robert Graves. He was a mainstay of the research seminar in the School of Classics, always keen to learn no matter how distant the topic might have been from his own specialisms: his respect for literary critics was thinly masked by his teasing term 'word-jugglers', but on any topic he would always be busily making notes in manuscript form for archiving in his alarmingly over-full office.

Jon inspired generations of students. One recent former student writes: 'As a student at the School of History, I had the honour of being tutored by Dr Coulston on the Introduction to Archaeology module. His profound knowledge, dedication and passion for the field of archaeology left an indelible mark on my academic journey. What I remember most clearly were his tutorials and the field trip to the St Andrews Castle. His teaching was very informative, rigorous and humorous. He was the one who



motivated me to continue my studies in the fields of history and art history.’ Jon’s Honours modules on Roman Art, the Roman Army, the City of Rome, and Roman Britain had cult status in the Faculty. He was dynamic in the classroom, meticulously prepared and passionate about the power of visual resources. Good humouredly, Jon was not always at the front of the queue for professional development opportunities in IT, but he was a consummate master of slide and, later, PowerPoint presentations. Teaching and research presentations by Jon were impressive performances.

Jon was a supportive, kind and dedicated colleague; his cheeky, almost boyish sense of humour was never far from the surface, even to the end. Particularly cruelly, he was due to retire next year. We miss him and have taken strength from the messages of condolence from all around the world. Jon is survived by Hazel, his parents, his brother Andy and his sisters Niki, Cathy and Helen.