

# SATIPS

Support and training in Prep, Primary and Senior Schools

Classics

## Editor's note

It has been an eventful year, and an exciting time to be involved with the world of prep school Classics teaching.

I should like to begin this edition of the broadsheet by thanking Tim Peters of Lancing College for his hard work as editor these past five years. Now that he has decided to hand over the reins I am delighted to take on the role, and hope that I can continue to attain the high standards he set.

The IAPS conference in April, "Classics: Back to the Future" – as I wrote in my account of the day earlier this year – proved a splendid note on which to begin the summer term. Of particular note was the high turnout – some seventy delegates – including a good number of young Classics teachers nevertheless keen to approach the subject with traditional rigour and a grammatical focus. One could not help but feel enthused by the heady mix of experienced scholarship and a vibrant zeal for promoting the classical languages in schools. I was left with the strong impression that the future of Classics is in safe hands.

This atmosphere was again to be found at the ISEB conference at Stowe School in June ("Classics Teaching Today: Practice, Principles and Prospects"), with an array of compelling and learned speakers and another packed house. Fred Pragnell has kindly agreed to pen a write-up of the day's proceedings – see below this piece.

The next date for the diary is the SATIPS conference "Classics: A Testing Time", which is taking place on Friday 4th November at Holborn Bars in London (EC1N 2NQ). Bob Bass and Jonathan Cox – both highly experienced examiners – will be leading the day with discussions surrounding the setting and marking of Latin language papers, at secondary as well as prep school level. Further details can be obtained from Sarah Kirby-Smith via [training@satips.org](mailto:training@satips.org).

Bob also continues to work wonders in creating new resources for Latin and Greek. He discusses his new Streamlined Greek course for GCSE later on herein, in addition to a second piece on standards in classical scholarship.

The only sour note of 2016, from a classical perspective, was the somewhat dispiriting news that the government has decided to ban all Latin

acronyms, abbreviations and so forth from its official websites, apparently in the name of clarity. (I am uncertain as to how "etc." is to be more clearly rendered.) At any rate, in case you are questioned by pupils, parents or colleagues regarding the relevance of Latin to our own language I have composed the following handy macaronic poem.

**Alas! iam nobis desperandum,  
lost are i.e., sic, per and  
all ab origine latina –  
nefas deus ex machina.  
Latin roots shrink back in fear,  
the government lifts up its spear  
and contorquens dirigit ictu  
certo – horribile dictu –  
absque capite ad calcem  
coruscat senatus falcem.  
Ergo, ad lib, re, erratum,  
de jure, de facto, datum,  
e.g., ad hoc, in absentia,  
quid pro quo, et al, et cetera,  
all such words we must forego –  
vale, cherished status quo.  
(Quam Danaos dona ferentes  
plus odi has diras gentes.)  
Hear me – ab imo pectore –  
and this sublinguistic foray,  
ere these treasures all are gone,  
deemed hitherto sine qua non.  
Res ipsa loquitur, ad litem,  
legal terms ad infinitum,  
pace, in loco parentis,  
bona fide, compos mentis.  
(Cui bono can this change be?  
Obvious even prima facie.)  
Lacrimae rerum, pro rata,  
ibidem, vel sim, errata,  
uberrima fides, pro tem,  
affidavit, ex, post mortem,  
tempus fugit, terra firma,  
ipso facto, vice versa.  
Counsel too we wisely seek, o  
patres nostri ab antiquo:  
inter arma silent leges;  
quis custodiet custodes?  
De Flacco, post referendum,  
tellus pulsat – nunc bibendum.  
Heed this warning, de profundis –  
Britannia sic regnabit undis.  
(I hope to this I can attest,  
Tho' errare humanum est.)  
Here stands complete my memorandum –  
writ, quod erat demonstrandum. 🐾**

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I shall leave off here with all best wishes for the remainder of the Christmas term and the New Year – I hope to see many of you at the November conference.

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### **ISEB Classics Conference, Stowe School**

Those teachers who were able to attend the one day conference had a most enjoyable and instructive time. Coming from a London prep school where cat-swinging is out of the question, I felt enlivened by the grandeur and scale of the buildings as I drove through those famous grounds.

The theme “Classics teaching today: practice, principles and prospects” was fleshed out by a number of excellent presentations. The position of prep school Latin and how it can best be linked to what follows in the senior school in Year 9 was addressed by Mark Edwards of the Dragon School and later picked up on by Kris Waite of Caterham School.

The central question of how to dovetail the traditional prep school approach to the CLC reading method used predominantly in the senior schools was aired. The allied questions of levels required both for CE – whether 1, 2 or 3 – and those for the individual scholarship papers set by the senior schools were also discussed.

The pressure involved in preparing pupils for scholarship exams to be sat in some cases as early as February was also raised. Kris touched on the problem of accommodating pupils coming into Year 9 with a grammar level at times beyond GCSE alongside those with a CLC background.

In his presentation on Latin for Common Entrance and Scholarship, ISEB Team Leader Bob Bass, from Orwell Park School, highlighted the re-introduction of compulsory English into Latin translation into the new GCSE exam from 2018. The two simple sentences of a CE level 1 is perhaps vindication of ISEB’s insistence that candidates at all levels learn to translate such basic phrases into Latin, though the chasm between the sentences even at CE level 3 and the scholarship prose composition papers is huge. It was agreed that closer co-ordination between the senior schools and their respective feeder prep schools would be very helpful.

In their presentations “Thoughts on my first year of teaching Latin” and “Classics teaching and ICT in the classroom”, Charlotte Matthews from Beachborough School and Laura Rindler of New College School, Oxford, showed how they used their enthusiasm and the wonders of technology

to open up the world of Greece and ancient Rome. For example, the click of a button brings us the British Museum’s presentation on “What’s in a pot?” – surely more inspiring than the forlorn black and white photographs in former textbooks. Although electronic dictionaries have their place in helping with vocabulary, it is especially in Classical Civilization that teaching and learning have been transformed by technology.

In his presentation “Classical Greek for Common Entrance”, ISEB Team Leader Michael Bevington, of Stowe School, expressed his hope that the revised and reduced level 2 syllabus would encourage more schools to get their pupils to sit the exam. Too often in the past, pressure of time in a subject often taught outside normal school hours meant that the syllabus was not completed and pupils not entered for the exam.

Before Michael’s tour of the State Rooms, lunch had provided teachers the opportunity to discuss what had been raised and compare personal experience. Plus ça change...

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### **The R Word**

As Bruno Shovelton of the Dragon School pointed out at the ISEB conference at Stowe in June, the IAPS day at Oxford organised by Fred Pragnell earlier in the year was inspiring and remarkable for the variety of approaches, each advocated by their respective supporters, from which the keen prep school Classics teacher (is there any other kind?) can cherry-pick. What I was especially heartened to see was that these approaches had a common aim, that of imparting rigour to our pupils rather than the ability to guess. The Cambridge Latin Course came in for quite a lambasting.

I have long been of the upbeat view that, despite the subject’s history of tribulations, Latin’s future is assured. What does concern me however is the quality of that legacy. This is reflected in the fact that even at Oxford and Cambridge first-year undergraduate courses in grammar are offered, because it can no longer be assumed that those joining tertiary education from school ‘know their onions’. They may be able to read with a degree of understanding their set texts (I wonder how many have read beyond these at A level?), and know all about Roman slavery, but how many can construct an elementary Latin sentence like ‘I knew what they were doing’?

I have just been reading Hugh Lloyd-Jones’ lengthy introduction to his 1982 translation of Wilamowitz’s ‘History of Classical Scholarship’, in which he makes two telling comments: ‘... scholars are sometimes criticised for over-concentration upon textual and linguistic studies.

The critics are not altogether without justification, but they should remember that without a certain number of people who know Greek and Latin really well classical studies will perish; study of classical literature in translation is better than nothing, but it is a miserable substitute for the real thing.’ (p. xxix)

And, on the next page:

‘The threat to the independent schools and the pressure in favour of vocational training in schools of all kinds means that each year fewer people start to learn Greek and Latin at the age at which the memory is best; indeed, the activity of so-called educational experts means that during these years fewer and fewer people are learning anything at all. In all western countries, that is the main problem now confronting the study of antiquity.’

Great stuff, isn’t it? Yet this was written more than thirty years ago. I think his points are truer more than ever now.

As some of you will know, I am a great fan of working from English into Latin from the word go; I know that others are, too. There is no room for guesswork or approximation in this approach, because rigour and precision are the sine quibus non of success in it. It is a rapid and efficient discriminator: a child’s aptitude or otherwise in Latin composition quickly alerts the teacher as to who is and who is not going to be a scholarship candidate is a few years’ time. I am convinced also, though I have no research evidence to back it up, that a young learner’s reading of Latin texts will improve through the greater familiarity with morphology he has acquired during the course of his own compositions, however elementary. Logical deduction hopefully replaces vague, inaccurate creativity.

For some time now the Unique Selling Point of Greek and Latin GCSE’s has been the fact that these are the only languages at this level which require familiarity with and an appreciation of literature in the original language. But we all know what this means: grinding through a few hundred lines of text, and memorising the translation and a handful of literary terms with examples. And then what’s in store for A level? – more of the same. What I should like to see is the end of prescribed literary texts at GCSE; the time saved would be better spent on mastering the language. This need not mean the end of reading texts in class. The teacher knows when his pupils can manage a short piece of Catullus or Martial, or whatever his favourite prose snippets may be; but dipping toes in the water pre-GCSE, and when judged appropriate, is different from a slog through a set text in the selection of which the teacher has no choice. Greater linguistic competence would mean that those pupils progressing to the sixth form would be better equipped and

more confident in tackling the prescribed texts at that level, and would not be in need of remedial grammar lessons in their first year at university.

### **Streamlined Greek**

In the mid-1990s teachers in my establishment were advised by management that twins would be joining the school in the following September, and that their results in the preliminary assessment tests were off the top of all the scales. They joined us in Year 5, so in the normal course of events I would not be seeing them for Latin until Year 6. However, Mum asked for them to be exposed to some Greek, off timetable; so they were.

In the mid-90s the availability of materials for teaching ten year-olds Greek was even more desperate than today’s. The boys had no Latin, so I could not draw parallels with that. It was a case of presenting the basics in a straightforward way, and setting exercises based on the grammatical topics explained. We soon fell in to a regular weekly routine. I would, during the week, write and provide explanations and exercises, which they would do on a Sunday. I would receive their exercises, which were invariably perfectly done, on a Monday, after which I would provide more material for the next weekend. There was virtually no personal contact time, because they were getting everything right and simply taking in the explanations and acting on instructions accordingly. To use the current jargon, I was acting as facilitator rather than teacher.

By the time the lads started Latin at the start of Year 6, they were already well versed in the concepts of conjugations and declensions. It was a strange reversal of the norm: when we came across the perfect tense in Latin, for example, they would say: ‘Sir, that’s like the aorist in Greek, isn’t it?’

And so it went on, until in Year 8 they were messing around with subjunctives and optatives like nobody’s business, and they were reading Thucydides’ account of the Sphacteria episode, which I had rehashed for them following the adapted version in Wilding’s Greek for Beginners. (This book of course has acquired iconic status, but what a strange and idiosyncratic approach to grammatical sequencing it adopted).

In millennium year the lads both gained King’s scholarships to Westminster, between them gaining three A\*s and one A in their four Classics papers. I, meanwhile, had gathered together during those four years a collection of explanations, grammar tables and exercises taking young, illatinate Greek beginners from the alphabet to something just beyond GCSE level. I resolved that this would one day become a course book.

Well, it’s been on the back-burner for a while now, with the odd tweaking here and there as 🍷

time permitted, i.e. during the holidays. I never got back to the enviable state of playing around with optatives in Year 8 again, my immediate target being to get Year 8 Greek beginners, on one lesson a week, to something around CE standard. This involved re-typing much of the material using a Unicode Greek font (my favourite is New Athena Unicode), and eventually ended up as Greek as a Treat, which is now my staple textbook. Book 1 received such an enthusiastic reception by a secondary school colleague in Bath two years ago that I was encouraged to flesh out Books 2 and 3. I then made an executive decision, earlier this year, to combine all three parts into one, and have now ended up with a single-volume course – about 280 A4 pages – leading to GCSE level, but aimed at young learners. The lay-out is spacious, explanations are not over-complicated, and the content is non-intimidatory. It is a one-stop resource covering everything that's needed. I have called it Streamlined Greek. If you would like to have a look at it do get in touch and I will happily send you a \*.pdf file which you can use on your digital devices, Smartboard, or photocopy as you wish.

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