

A TRIBUTE TO ANTON

The Malago Society meeting on Tuesday 28 April was the first following Anton's death on 29 March 2015. Before John Penny's talk, ANDRÉ COUTANCHE delivered this appreciation of Anton ...

David Delius Anton Bantock. Where do you start?

Perhaps with those first names. We all knew him as Anton, but that was the third of his given names - after Anton Chekhov, the nineteenth century Russian author and playwright. The Delius was after Frederick Delius, the English composer who was a friend of Anton's grandfather, the composer Sir Granville Bantock. And the David was because his mother was Welsh. Anton had very strong Welsh connections, and his mother's diary recorded when he was a small boy, 'David's Welsh is coming on nicely'.

So who was this D.D.A. Bantock? 'A man o' pairts', as they say in Scotland - multi-talented and multi-faceted. But if we want one word to describe him, it would have to be 'teacher'. Teacher in the literal, job-description sense but also much more widely.

It was his first job as a teacher that brought him to Bristol, and he stayed here. Well, he stayed here during term-time - in the school holidays, he was off. Off around the world, but not jet-setting - quite the opposite. Usually, the first stage of his journey was on foot to Temple Meads, with his rucksack on his back. Then it was to whichever part of the world he had decided to visit next - Europe, Africa, the Middle East, India, etc. etc. - etc. He was, of course, passionately interested in the history of the places he visited, and also the buildings. Anton was a bit of a frustrated architect - he would like to have been an architect, but he couldn't do the mathematical or engineering side of it. Those of you who are familiar with his drawings will know how striking his drawings of buildings and places are. Incidentally, he never had a camera on his travels - he drew everything he wanted a visual record of. But history and buildings were just part of his adventures - when Anton travelled, he met people.

A lot of the time, especially in his earlier journeys, he *had* to meet people - he hadn't booked anywhere to stay and just asked anyone he came across whether they knew of someone who could offer a bed for the night. It always seemed to work, and so he built up contacts in many countries, contacts who became friends, friends whose friendship extended to their children as they grew up, and sometimes to a third generation.

Many of the countries Anton went to were in what was then called the Third World - nowadays, we call them Developing Countries. In many of those countries, education was poor quality, or difficult to access, or both - and usually not free. And so Anton the Bemmie Down history teacher became Anton the world educator. He paid for the children of his friends to go to school. If they did well and wanted to go on to further education outside their own country, he paid for some of them to come to Bristol and go to university here. Often they stayed in his bungalow at 131 Queens Road, Witherwood - 'Fanny's Place', as he called it (for suitably historical reasons).

The history teacher didn't just rely on school textbooks - he accumulated his own collection of books which he kept in his classroom at Bedminster Down School. One of his pride and joys was a complete bound set of the 'Illustrated London News', which he bought for ten guineas at a second-hand bookshop in Bognor Regis. I made that last bit up about where he bought it, but you get the idea. In any case, a slightly elaborated tale to engage and amuse his listeners was part of Anton's teaching style.

When he retired, all the books he was keeping at school had to be moved out to his little bungalow. There wasn't room, so he built an extension, not as other people would, as a spare bedroom, or a conservatory, but as a purpose-built library. That got him thinking. He was already doing talks to local history societies and community groups. Now he had his library as a terrific teaching resource at home. He was still supporting young people's education in developing countries. And so it all

came together as 'The University of Withywood' - evening classes at Fanny's Place on a range of subjects - usually historical or about his travels - plus visiting speakers on other subjects which Anton couldn't teach himself - all open to anyone for a minimum payment of £1 per session. All the money raised went to the sponsorship fund to help the overseas students.

Some of you have been to Anton's classes at the University of Withywood and met people you wouldn't otherwise have known - sometimes sitting on their laps as everyone squeezed into his small sitting room and onto his eccentric furniture. Some of us have multiple degrees from the University, awarded with suitable pomp at degree-giving ceremonies in the back garden. I've been a visiting lecturer on a couple of occasions. And Marie Jo was a senior member of the Faculty of Modern Languages, giving French conversation classes at the University of Withywood annexe - our house further down Queens Road. Later on, Anton's instinct for performance gave rise to Withywood University Performing Arts, with plays wot he wrote being staged in the back garden. But he never lost sight of the essential other side of the coin - raising money for the sponsorship fund to support education in the Third World. One of Anton's friends, a Russian lady at Bristol University, was introducing him to an audience for a talk he was giving there and she described the University of Withywood as '50% a joke - and 100% serious'.

I think Anton himself would have put the University of Withywood at the centre of his story. But in following that thread, I've skipped over other facets. Anton used to tell the story against himself that, as history master at Bemmie Down, he was asked to do something about local history. 'Local history?' he replied, 'there's no local history around here'. As he went on to discover how wrong he was - and as he enjoyed it more and more - the train of events began which led to the foundation of the Malago Society - almost exactly 40 years ago.

Anton's passion for buildings and local history was an essential part of the campaign, initiated by Councillor Richard Eddy, for a Conservation Area based on old Bishopsworth village. And when Anton and others had written the report which in due course resulted in the Conservation Area, I rashly said, 'Why don't we start a permanent group to look after the area, and wider south-west Bristol, monitoring planning applications and helping to care for our parks and green spaces?'. And so was born Malago Valley Conservation Group, now 20 years old, with Anton as a founder-member and a committee member all that time.

I can't go on all evening - as Anton used to do - but there's one of his talents I haven't mentioned which you all know about. He wrote. He wrote a lot. He wrote letters - long letters - to friends while he was on his school holiday travels, letters which Christine Lillington painstakingly decoded - have you seen Anton's handwriting? - and typed up. Many of those became booklets which were sold to raise money for the University of Withywood Sponsorship Fund. He wrote numerous articles for MALAGO Magazine. And, of course, he researched and wrote the definitive history of the Smyth family of Ashton Court for the Malago Society - the only five-volume trilogy in publishing history.

The little boy whose Welsh was coming on nicely didn't stop there. His interest, his travels and hard work gave him a working knowledge of French, German, Polish, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, a bit of Spanish and Italian, and, when his nephew married a Japanese lady and moved to Japan - where Anton's brother and his wife already lived - he started to learn Japanese.

David Delius Anton Bantock. Linguist - letter-writer - artist - author - lecturer - performer. Above all - teacher. Trouble-maker. Sometimes an irritating nuisance.

When people are paying tribute to a late friend, they sometimes say: 'They broke the mould after they made him'. I don't think there was a mould for Anton in the first place. He was a self-made man - though a million miles away from the narrow, financial sense in which that's usually meant. He did what he did out of a deep moral sense. He would have described it in religious terms, but I'll just use the phrase which in my book is about the highest praise you can give someone when they're no longer with us. Anton made a difference.