This address was given at Donald Russell's funeral in the College chapel on 8th March 2020

Ten minutes is not much of a ration of time to evoke - in love and gratitude - a friend who lived for a century, all but six months. Even those with much shorter lives have been, effectively, more than one person. So I shall say a little about three Donalds, and conclude with two ways in which our colleague must be remembered as a consistent and indivisible whole. If that schema makes this brief oration a Quincunx, you will now know, thanks to the text - chosen by Donald - which Michael [Winterbottom] has just read, why I point that out... [the text was from Sir Thomas Browne's *Garden of Cyrus*].

The *bios* of Donald Russell the First, then, 1920-48, must now be reconstructed from sound authorities, in the general absence of surviving witnesses (David Raeburn is the only one known to me). Among these sources, the most helpful by far is the memoir preserved by the British Academy, in Donald's own MS, headed (I quote) 'in usum necrologorum'. Since I find myself now just such an obituarist, if an oral one, I am indeed profoundly grateful for this document, as well as much touched by parts of it, as I think you will be too.

The first sign of the famous Hellenist in the making comes in a note of an illness at secondary school. In 2003 he wrote 'I spent [the time] ... translating Demosthenes' Third Philippic, & I'm not sure if I could do it any better today'. Scholarship to Balliol in 1939 (the examination was 7 3-hour papers), Mods in 1940 by emergency disposition, a year of work on the Greats course, call-up to the Army, and in 1943 secondment to Japanese code-breaking, which took him to Bletchley Park, about which he was long becomingly discreet. As recently as ten years ago, he wrote 'I am glad I kept no diary, or any of the letters I sent to friends or family in those days'. But that is, I think, from talking to him about it often, because he was actually very happy and fulfilled by his crucially important work there. He also told me something that he didn't put in his memoir. One of Bletchley's many researchers after the veil of secrecy was eventually lifted from the archives visited him to hear his memories, and on leaving, said, 'by the way, I've seen your record - did they ever tell you your final assessment? Discharged with the highest merit.' No-one had, in fact, ever told him that. The story returns to Oxford, to Greats in 1947, and two terms of work at Christ Church on a DPhil with E.R. Dodds as supervisor. Donald again: 'I still regard myself as his disciple, though I am so much more timid and conservative than he was'. It was at a class on Plotinus run by Dodds that Donald met Colin Roberts, tutor in Greek at St John's; in 1948 Colin invited him to apply for a fellowship, to fulfill a need perceived to be mainly in Latin '[St John's]', writes Donald, 'thought there was a longer future in it than Greek'. He got it: and that ends my first life.

Donald's long and golden second age runs from 1948 to 1992. 'I think' (he writes) 'my sixties the happiest and most fruitful time of my life'. He is a Tutorial Fellow of St Johns, fully committed to the education, in the fullest sense, of undergraduates, and often teaching 20 hours of tutorials a week. With seniority, he becomes a person of considerable authority in the Faculty of Literae Humaniores, as it then was, and especially in the Sub-Faculty of Classical Languages and Literature. Donald claimed, no doubt correctly, that he played a major part in the reforms of the structure of the four-year Greats course which gave literature a standing equal to ancient history and philosophy, and, shortly after, permitted those who had not had the opportunity to study Greek at school to develop it while at Oxford. This was no mere syllabus reform - Donald thought of it as a revolution - but the most important modification to Greats since its foundation a century before, and the foundational impulse to

changes still underway today, to make the study of the Greeks and Romans and the world they inhabited accessible to students of every background. I hope therefore that Donald would have endorsed our choice of charity for the collection this afternoon, since these are also very much the aims of *Classics for All*.

These years also see Donald's reputation as a scholar and as a Hellenist burgeon. These attainments and their influence will no doubt be the subject of much detailed laudation at a future memorial event, as and when pestilence permits such gathering. For this funereal context, it is better to emphasize a different kind of flowering. I was speaking to Michael Moriarty, taught Latin literature by Donald in 1950, the other day, and he said 'you know, Donald was very shy, and quite tongue-tied, in those days - everything changed when he met Joy'. Donald met Joyceline Dickinson in 1951, and they married in 1967 - the delay derived from the needs of elderly parents on both sides, but Donald later greatly regretted it . All who knew him could see how this partnership transformed every aspect of his life: it is the centrepiece of his reminiscences. The words about happiness and fruitfulness which I quoted a moment ago are followed in that memoir by 'mainly because of Joy'. And of the marriage itself he says 'once the decision was made, the gates of heaven opened for me'. The catastrophe of losing her to cancer in 1992 needs no evocation.

Of the third period, Donald's last 28 years, many of us here today know much more. The sadness and desolation of Joy's death never wholly left him, but her memory also greatly comforted him: 'I am still so conscious of her love and courage all the time'. But these were also in themselves years of happy friendship and companionship, and of Donald's own hospitality at Belsyre Court; this was, too, a time when he could enjoy, and add to, the very considerable scholarly esteem which his work had brought him. It is of course famous, but must be recalled here, how he continued until very recently to teach prose and verse composition to undergraduates. He was also regularly consulted on, it always seemed to me, *increasingly* obscure and desperate pieces of late Antique learning. He would speak of how, in order to establish a more plausible text, he had to infiltrate the contorted thought of the writer - Synesius *On dreams*, or the *Solutiones ad Chosroem* - and succeeded in making new emendations in these strange treatises even in his last months.

After 2008, these were, of course, also the years of increasing bodily infirmity, met with resolution and with notable realism and common sense, supported by that very evident robustness of mind. In this address, it is essential to do justice to the extraordinary devotion to Donald's welfare over nearly 30 years of Jenny Barney, always ready to help, thoughtfully, responsively, unobtrusively, kindly - and latterly ever adjusting to inevitably more demanding needs. Donald appreciated that his intellectual and emotional well-being derived from the independence which retaining his own flat gave him, and that it might not long survive institutionalisation - but also that this self-determination was owed, to a very important degree, to all that Jenny has provided so willingly.

In this Chapel, it is proper for us to give thanks for Donald's exceptional attachment to this College. No-one has been able to find a longer span of Fellowship: it is around 72 years since he was elected, alongside Howard Colvin, and that amounts to a good deal more than a seventh of this society's history. The span covers many different incarnations of St John's - like rivers, colleges flow differently after you have once stepped into them. Donald found the now nearly forgotten St John's of President William Costin an extremely agreeable place, and always spoke with great affection the warmth of his welcome here. He gave much in

return. The acme of his career coincided with the college's extraordinary efflorescence of academic success, of which his students were part: but he was a memorable tutor - and a very demanding one - long before, and indeed long after, as his former pupils here today can testify. He served the college in innumerable other ways - he was the first ever Tutor for Admissions, for instance - retaining a highly principled sense of his duty and responsibilities on a Governing Body which was for most of his career nearly co-extensive with the body of tutors. Characteristically, he identifies 'good humour, conscientiousness and concern' as the central virtues needed for College office.

I don't at all wish to imply that his affection for this place was uncritical: his principles included a strong sense of what could be wrong with policies, and, it has to be said, with his colleagues' behaviour, and the practical wisdom of his years as an Official Fellow fed a rich flow of sometimes rather pointed anecdote shared with visitors in his retirement. Donald remembered his long past with deep affection, but he lived in it less than some much younger than he. He was up to date with most aspects of what was happening at St John's, and was very pleased to have got to know Maggie Snowling, his eighth President. And, in a sense, his slice of the College's history is even longer than his Fellowship. Colin Roberts, his patron and first colleague, had become a Fellow in 1934; and in Donald's last months, it gave him great pleasure to meet Emma Greensmith, who has taken up the post which he had himself held - another expert in late Greek, too, and a deserving recipient of a great many books from a very substantial library. As he himself understood, her appointment frames his long career, on the other side - and open-endedly.

Finally, though, a different way to pull the threads together. From undergraduate days to his last weeks, Donald read Greek philosophy, and indeed nearly became a philosophy tutor. As literature or as philosophy, the texts which he interpreted were far from being only the raw material of a great scholarly and educational career. He approved what they taught - he praises his lifelong companion Plutarch of Chaeronea as 'portrayer of some of the best features of the ancient world'. This is understatement: Donald's reading nourished a careful and reflective engagement with that deceptively simple Greek question, *ti dei prattein*, what ought we to do? And here too his keen sense of his duty lasted into his very last weeks. He was an emphatic supporter of our membership of the European Union, and - something which might have surprised those who knew his somewhat conservative political positions earlier in life - when offered a government headed by a Balliol classicist, he voted elsewhere.

The ethics which he read spoke to the principles by which he lived, and his daily wisdom, generosity of heart, and subtle understanding of what people felt and feel, were not distinct from the percipience and sophistication with which he read Plato or Plutarch. His choice of the reading which we just heard, like his old, old interest in Plutarch's reflections on Socrates' experience of the divine, was also part of this lived Greek thought, as well as something which one might expect of a real disciple of E.R. Dodds. These are high matters: but the ultimate consequence of this fusion of thought and reading was a kind of moral greatness, visible in a long life of high principle.

Timid and conservative? I don't think so. Donald, *heros chreste, chaire.*