

ANNA MORPURGO DAVIES, 10 YEARS ON

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Memories: Mark Newbrook

I met Anna in early 1973 when I was 16; she was 35. My well-connected school in Birkenhead had sent me on a trip to Oxford and Cambridge so that I could compare the courses. Anna was intrigued by my ‘posh Scouse’ accent and by my keen interest in philology and the decipherment of scripts. She inspired me hugely and then drove me to Christ Church where I had an appointment, cursing herself as she drove in a mixture of English and Italian. Anna became almost a second mother to me during my time at Oxford. I admired her so much and I truly loved her classes.

She helped me to a First by training me to the point where I won the Comparative Philology Prize. Her first words to me after my final Greats exam were ‘Are you sober, Mark? Not for long!’ and we all headed out to Charlbury for a pub dinner. I regularly visited her at Somerville in my Reading days and at intervals when back in the UK. When I became a skeptical linguist we used to discuss people like Edwin Bryant. My Mum wanted to meet her, I think to compare notes on me, but never did. If I ever did anything remotely unrespectable she would say ‘Oh Mark, would you do that in front of Anna Davies?’.

It is hard to believe that Anna is ten years dead. Although I saw less of her in her later years, I still miss her greatly.