

## IN MEMORIAM JACT, 1963–2015

On 2 January 2015, two years after celebrating its golden jubilee, the Joint Association of Classical Teachers (JACT) completed its merger with the Classical Association (CA). With the exception of the JACT summer schools, which have been hived off under a new organization, JSST (the Joint Association of Classics Teachers Summer Schools Trust), all of JACT's activities and publications have been subsumed within existing CA structures, although, at the time of writing, information on exactly how the merger will work in practice has been hard to unearth. The silence surrounding JACT's demise and the lack of public debate about, or concerted opposition to, what seems to be a takeover of JACT by the CA is in stark contrast to the heated discussion and protracted negotiations that accompanied JACT's birth, and suggests that few people mourn its passing. In fact, for many of JACT's long-standing and long-suffering members it may have come as a relief to see the Association put out of its misery after twenty years of steady decline, marked by poor communication with its members (typified by its under-resourced and rarely updated website) and a corresponding loss of confidence among members in the Association (demonstrated by the very low attendance at the annual general meetings). JACT should not be allowed to pass into obscurity, however, without some recognition of the Association's highly productive early history and its crucial role in reshaping Classics in the 1960s and 1970s. In this article I will review its achievements, consider reasons for its decline, and suggest what the new CA/JACT organization might do to retain, or rather revive, the features of JACT which made it such an effective catalyst for change and innovation.

Formed in 1963 at a time of crisis for the humanities as a whole and Classics in particular, JACT's birth was largely engineered by John Sharwood Smith,<sup>1</sup> a lecturer in Classics education at the London

<sup>1</sup> C. Stray, 'Classics in the Curriculum up to the 1960s', in J. Morwood (ed.), *The Teaching of Classics* (Cambridge, 2003), 4.

Institute of Education, and it required all his diplomatic skills to gain the support needed from the CA, the Association for the Reform of Latin Teaching (ARLT), and the Orbilian Society<sup>2</sup> to form yet another classical society. To Sharwood Smith's mind, none of the existing societies seemed suitably placed to effect reform on an adequate scale and undertake the major tasks that changing circumstances demanded (in particular, the decision by Oxford and Cambridge in 1960 to remove Latin as a matriculation requirement).<sup>3</sup> Opponents, however, saw no reason for urgent action and cited, among other things, the steady increase in candidates in Latin and Greek at O-Level and A-Level since 1945 as evidence that all was well with Classics in schools. Tom Melluish, a fierce defender of traditional Classics and a leading figure in the ARLT and the Orbilian Society, wrote that

The future of Latin... is by no means unhealthy. In spite of uninformed opinion and the dicta of interested parties more Latin is being studied today than ever before. Given the prospect that with reasonable application, on a satisfactory time-allowance, even the 'B' boy may not despair of a pass, the skies would be fairer still.<sup>4</sup>

In the same publication, Charles Baty, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Staff Inspector for Classics, later to become JACT's first Honorary Secretary General, stated that 'there is... every sign that the change in [Oxford and Cambridge's] requirements is having little or no effect in schools'.<sup>5</sup> Written less than two years after the decision taken by Oxford and Cambridge and long before the effects of the decision could be felt in schools, this was a serious misreading of the situation. Between 1960 and 1975 Latin O-Level entries fell by forty per cent; without JACT's lead, Classics, in state schools at least, would have faced terminal decline by the mid-1980s. JACT played a pivotal part in reshaping Classics as a subject able to meet the needs of the mixed-ability classroom, driven by the belief that the expansion of the comprehensive school programme presented an opportunity rather than a threat, a chance to re-invent Classics as a subject for all pupils, not

<sup>2</sup> For a brief description of the Orbilian Society, see M. Forrest, *Modernising the Classics* (Exeter, 1996), 6. It was dissolved in 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Extispex, 'The first decade: a scrutiny of JACT', *Didaskalos* 4.2 (1973), 260.

<sup>4</sup> T. W. Melluish, 'Latin Inquiry', in T. W. Melluish (ed.), *Re-appraisal* (1962), 47. *Re-appraisal* was published by the CA in March 1962 as a supplement to *G&R* 9.1 in response to the decision by Oxford and Cambridge to remove Latin as a matriculation requirement.

<sup>5</sup> C. W. Baty, 'Classics in Schools', in Melluish (n. 4), 12.

only those in grammar schools, whose selected intake made up roughly twenty-five per cent of the school population in the early 1960s.

What did JACT achieve in its early years? We can learn much of its activities from Sharwood Smith, who, as well as being the driving force behind the creation of the Association, was the first editor of its flagship journal, *Didaskalos*. Writing in 1973 under the pseudonym Extispex, he submitted JACT's first ten years to detailed scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> After setting out what might today be called the Association's mission statement ('helping teachers to recognize and solve their problems: problems which already existed and problems which were about to arise'), he listed its successes in fulfilling this purpose, which were: the Inquiry Bureau, which produced bibliographies, recordings of Latin and Greek, pamphlets for the sixth-form teacher, and similar aids ('though not', he noted, 'without, here and there, some initial difficulties'); the *Bulletin*, which appeared regularly and contained a wide range of useful information, from details of university courses to recent publications of interest to schools; *Didaskalos*, along with the twenty or so conferences which acted as a the springboard either for *Didaskalos* articles or for working parties to further some specific activity; three major pamphlets, two of which addressed major educational issues of the time – the Robbins Report on the future of universities and the proposal for the widespread introduction of comprehensive schools – and a third on the state of Classics in the USA, which, in Sharwood Smith's words, 'aroused less interest than it deserved'; the series of *New Surveys in the Classics*, a joint venture with the CA's *Greece & Rome* which brought teachers up to date with current scholarship on major authors such as Virgil, Homer, Cicero and Tacitus; and lastly, almost as an afterthought, the new JACT A-Level Ancient History syllabus and the Greek Summer School.

Sharwood Smith then turned to the Association's shortcomings. First, the JACT Greek Committee had not produced a Greek equivalent of the *Cambridge Latin Course*. Secondly, little progress had been made in securing recognition for Classical Studies as a school subject; thirdly, JACT had been unable to provide support for Latin teachers in preparatory schools during reform of the Common Entrance examination. Lastly, 'a more disappointing failure than all these', JACT had

<sup>6</sup> Extispex (n. 3), 259–75.

failed to persuade large numbers of secondary school Classics teachers to join the Association.<sup>7</sup>

Of these shortcomings, the first two were soon addressed. The only obstacle to the development of a new Greek course had been a lack of funding, but when, under a year after Sharwood Smith wrote his scrutiny, an appeal was launched, £63,000 was raised in less than twelve months; within four years *Reading Greek* had been published and rapidly established itself as the leading introductory Greek course for sixth forms and universities. As for Classical Studies, the JACT A-Level Classical Studies Committee had already developed proposals for a syllabus to go alongside the JACT A-Level Ancient History course. Once this was approved and introduced, it immediately began to attract a wide range of students who previously would never have considered studying Classics. Classical Studies, or Classical Civilization as it later became known, went on to become by far the most popular classical subject at A-Level: by 1993, twenty years after Sharwood Smith's scrutiny, it had significantly more candidates (4,494) than Latin, Greek, and Ancient History combined (1,172, 367, and 1,992 respectively).

The other shortcomings proved much more intractable. While it was perhaps not surprising that JACT's impact on policy at preparatory-school level was only ever very limited, it was a continuing source of frustration to find so many Classics teachers in secondary schools – in Sharwood Smith's estimate more than one thousand – choosing not to belong to JACT, and it clearly rankled:

At a time when a great deal of co-operative hard work is being done – and expense incurred – to secure a worthy future for the teaching of Classics, is it excessively partial to feel that abstaining from joining JACT is less a sign of sturdy independence than of myopia, meanness or perversity?<sup>8</sup>

Why were classroom teachers reluctant to join an organization which was doing so much to ensure the subject's, and thereby their own, future? It was probably not meanness, although many teachers might have thought the subscription expensive at two guineas in 1963. But it may have been myopia, insofar as many Classics teachers may not have had time to cast their gaze far beyond the confines of their schools as they constantly fought attempts to reduce their timetable allocation and were under continuous pressure from children, parents, and, not

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>8</sup> *Extispex* (n. 6), 265–6.

infrequently, colleagues to explain why, in the modern world, anyone should have to study Classics.

But even teachers who *were* interested in the future of Classics at a national level and stood to benefit from the reforms did not necessarily see the point of joining JACT or consider that it was serving their needs. The Association was, in a way, a victim of its own success: in redefining Classics and creating a place for it in the new comprehensive schools, it had also helped create a new breed of Classics teacher, a teacher whose timetable might consist predominantly of Classical Studies, with perhaps a little Latin and almost certainly a good deal of English or French or Mathematics – whatever they could offer to fill their timetable. It is easy to imagine that, in the eyes of such teachers, JACT, in spite of all its efforts to make Classics a subject for the many not the few, was an organization run by (and perhaps for) Classics teachers from a different world, far removed from the demands and challenges of the mixed-ability classroom. Such teachers might have found little of direct relevance to them in the pages of *Didaskalos* and rarely contributed to it, but interestingly the issue carrying Sharwood Smith's scrutiny of JACT also included a piece by Stephen Sharp, Head of Classical Studies in a large comprehensive school in West Yorkshire. In it he describes the ambitious and inclusive Classical Studies courses offered by his department but begins by setting out his reservations about JACT and many of his fellow members:

For a number of years, JACT has offered to the nation's panicking classicists a solidarity which has, in my opinion, hindered frank discussion of the part Classics should play in our schools. . . We continue to squander manpower in small sixth-form teaching groups, and accept a reputation for mild eccentricity as the price we pay for not having to teach more than the most able pupils. . . At meetings of Classics teachers up and down the country these past three years, an urgent desire to use Classics in the education of children has been less in evidence than the peculiar freemasonry based on sherry, Oxbridge colleges and textual criticism.

. . . One sentence, from a recent *Didaskalos*, is very revealing. 'Thus the cause of Classics in schools – which means essentially *specialist* Classics, for no amount of Latin or Classical Background courses up to O-level, however good they may be in the light of current developments, will serve the cause, unless there are those who go further – has much to gain and little to fear from this kind of flexible curriculum.' For me, this sums up so much: the siege mentality, the obsession with something called the Cause of Classics, the callous élitism. Even the language betrays wrong priorities – Classical *Background!*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> S. Sharp, 'Classical Studies: The Medium, Not the Message', *Didaskalos* 4.2 (1973), 276, emphasis in original.

Whether one agrees or not with Stephen Sharp's views, the worrying fact was that he, and teachers like him who were doing everything they could to introduce Classics to a much wider range of students, felt excluded from the classical community which he might have expected to be a source of support and encouragement.

Although the publication of Sharp's article in *Didaskalos* demonstrated that such teachers could have a voice in JACT, *Didaskalos* itself, as Sharwood Smith realized, was considered part of the problem. First, there was a perception that the content and direction of *Didaskalos* was dominated by a select few: for practical reasons, the JACT conferences organized by Sharwood Smith, which generated a significant proportion of *Didaskalos* articles, were restricted to a limited membership and attendance was by invitation only. Secondly, this elite was seen to be drawn from a particular type of school. Sharwood Smith quotes a letter from a comprehensive school teacher in the Midlands who, when asked why he did not join JACT, said that *Didaskalos* had no relevance for his pupils: 'by their modest standards it was "stratospheric", containing as it did, articles emanating from Eton and Manchester Grammar School'.<sup>10</sup> In another letter, a teacher cancelling his JACT subscription wrote:

While I shall always remain in favour of the study of the classics, the main effect of membership on me is the receipt of literature I have no time to read, preferring the classics. And in so far as I do look at it, I find it poor in quality. When, I ask myself, do the teachers, who in the name of duty plough through the lamentable and voluminous pages of *Didaskalos*, read, say, Herodotus? When did they last read the *Iliad* through?<sup>11</sup>

To Sharwood Smith, this letter encapsulated what he called the 'sanctuary theory of schoolmastering':

The idea that the schoolmaster's life, though full and strenuous, yet constitutes a sanctuary from new and vexatious ideas, where the mind can enjoy the crystalline calm of classical literature undistracted by the sort of ephemera that the doctor, the engineer or the scientist has to read if he is to remain master of his job.<sup>12</sup>

This, perhaps, lies at the heart of what Sharwood Smith meant by the 'myopia' of Classics teachers choosing not to join JACT: an inability to see that successful teachers must not only be well read in classical

<sup>10</sup> Extispex (n. 6), 273.

<sup>11</sup> Editorial, *Didaskalos* 4.2 (1973), 223.

<sup>12</sup> Editorial (n. 11), 224.

literature and constantly refresh their learning, but must also understand how perceptions of the subject change over time and be willing to modify their teaching accordingly. This was why Sharwood Smith sought out articles from as wide a range of school and university teachers as possible – and from a similarly wide range of disciplines – addressing both the theoretical and the practical aspects of Classics teaching. *Didaskalos* 2.2, the issue which included the Stephen Sharp and Extispex articles, neatly illustrates the journal’s scope and ambition. The other contributions to this issue were:

- ‘The Central Concepts of Judaism, Graeco-Roman Paganism and Christianity’, by the Revd M. F. Wiles, Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford;
- ‘The Central Concepts of Judaism, Graeco-Roman Paganism and Christianity: Why Should They Be Communicated in Schools Today?’, by C. Martin, Deputy Headmaster at Broadoak School, Weston-super-Mare;
- ‘Science, Technology and the Classics: A Case for Inter-disciplinary Teaching’, by J. E. Gordon, Professor of Material Technology in the Department of Applied Physical Sciences at the University of Reading;
- ‘A Survey of O-Level Latin’, by J. Watson-Wemyss, Senior Classics Master at Gravesend School for Boys;
- ‘The Battle of the Ancients and the Moderns: A Topic for General Studies?’, by P. J. C. Murray, Head of Classics and of General Studies at Bancroft’s School;
- ‘Some Recent Changes in the State of Classics in the United States’, by W. R. Connor, Professor of Classics at Princeton University;
- ‘On Greek Primers’, by G. Zuntz, Professor Emeritus of Hellenistic Greek at the University of Manchester;
- ‘On Secondment: Thoughts on Taking the Academic Diploma in Education at the Institute of Education, London, 1971–2’, by Jessamine Hoskins, Senior Classics Mistress at Godolphin and Latymer School.

Robin Barrow wrote in his first editorial after taking over from Sharwood Smith in 1975, that the strength of *Didaskalos* lay in its catholicism, its ‘determination to pursue, *pari passu*, the practical problems of the class-room, broader educational issues and points of classical scholarship’.<sup>13</sup> But Barrow admitted that as a result it had its detractors, in particular ‘a hard core of readers who were uneasy about the

<sup>13</sup> Editorial, *Didaskalos* 5.1 (1975), 1.

inclusion of contributions that strayed into the comfortable world of theory and speculation'. He unapologetically kept to the same formula and his first issue was heavily weighted towards the topic of philosophy. His time as editor was to be short, however, and after only two further issues *Didaskalos* merged with *Latin Teaching* in 1978 to form a new journal, *Hesperiam*. This too was short-lived and closed in 1984, after only six issues. Thereafter, JACT's publications were limited to the *Bulletin*, the *JACT Review* (though these two were later replaced by a single publication, the *Journal of Classics Teaching*), and *Omnibus*, its very successful magazine for sixth formers and the only JACT publication which the CA will continue to provide in print form. The *Journal of Classics Teaching* will only be available online (with free access), as part of the stable of CA journals supported by Cambridge University Press.

Looking back over JACT's fifty-year history, there is no question that the first fifteen years were its most dynamic and productive – nothing it subsequently achieved matched the development of Classical Civilization as a subject in its own right or the publication of *Reading Greek* – and the distinctive elements of JACT which enabled it to see through such significant reforms were the *Didaskalos* conferences, the articles arising from them, and the working parties formed to see through initiatives from first tentative proposals to final concrete outcomes (as was the case with Ancient History A-Level, as we shall see below). JACT's efforts to reform Classics were also made much easier by the pervading climate: radical change was underway across all aspects of education and, as Chris Stray noted, 'rethinking was the order of the day'.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the shift towards comprehensive schools – and the corresponding threat to grammar schools – forced teachers of *all* disciplines not only to review what they taught and how they taught it but also to re-evaluate the principles underpinning their subject. It was a time, too, when workloads were more manageable and teachers keen for reform had the time and energy to attend after-school meetings to address big questions and think through possible solutions. In 1969, for instance, a working party of the London Association of Classical Teachers, made up of twelve teachers and two university lecturers, met twenty times in nineteen months to consider possible changes to classical languages at A-Level. At the end of

<sup>14</sup> Stray (n. 1), 5.

their deliberations they produced a twenty-nine page working paper which not only set out the general principles and aims behind their proposals for new Greek and Latin A-Levels but also provided detailed syllabuses and specimen papers.<sup>15</sup>

Another feature of the 1960s, noted above, was the degree of dialogue across different sectors of education – state and independent, school and university – and different disciplines. This was evident, for instance, in the range of participants attending the two conferences organized by Sharwood Smith to examine the teaching of Ancient History: the first was held in March 1964 with twenty-six participants, comprising five Classics lecturers, five Education lecturers (four Classics specialists and one historian), fourteen teachers and two HMIs; the second was held in January 1965 with thirty-four participants, most of whom had attended the first conference, with roughly the same balance again of school and university representation, but with the addition of two delegates from examination boards and a lecturer from the University of Sydney (who talked to the conference about the position of Ancient History in Australian schools). This broad mix of participants enabled informed discussion of a wide range of issues, practical and theoretical, from comparison of teaching methods in ancient and modern history and the importance of students reading primary sources (though not Solon, whom Moses Finley, according to the conference report, called ‘unintelligible’),<sup>16</sup> to the number of questions that should be set on A-Level papers and the cost of setting and revising examinations. In spite of some inevitable differences, the second conference ended with general agreement on the best way to advance their ideas for a new type of examination at A-Level (the setting up of a working committee to secure support from schools and universities and to persuade an examination board to take on their proposals) and in due course the JACT Ancient History syllabus was introduced.

Fifty years on from these Ancient History conferences, the need for this type of conference is as pressing as ever, and no organization is better placed to revive them than the CA. Not only would this be a fitting way to mark its merger with JACT, but it would also help the CA to demonstrate a renewed commitment to supporting the teaching

<sup>15</sup> London Association of Classical Teachers, ‘Classics at Advanced Level’, LACT working paper no. 1 (1969).

<sup>16</sup> Privately circulated report on Didaskalos Conference 3, part 2 (1965), 3.

of Classics in schools, one of the four original objectives of the Association formulated at its first meeting in December 1903 (the precise wording was ‘to improve the practice of school teaching *by free discussion of its scope and methods*’).<sup>17</sup> When JACT was created, although the CA continued to support Classics teaching nationally through its publications, in particular *New Surveys in the Classics*, and regionally through its local branches, it was JACT which tended to coordinate campaigns on major issues such as the place of Classics in the national curriculum, and there was a shift in the CA’s focus. Faced with falling attendance at the annual conference and a worrying lack of new members, and stirred into action by the Treasurer, Richard Wallace, who, in a paper for consideration by Council in November 1988 set out ‘trenchantly and succinctly a diagnosis of what was wrong and a proposed remedy’, the CA made radical changes to the purpose and format of the conference, with the focus firmly on new entrants to the profession.<sup>18</sup> This proved an immediate success. The 1992 Proceedings reported that

the new format of the Conference is clearly proving popular, particularly among younger Classicists. These included not only the graduate students who read many of the papers. . . but as in former years, undergraduates and some PGCE students supported by Association Bursaries.<sup>19</sup>

It is time now for the CA to build on this success and to use the template of the *Didaskalos* conferences to provide a platform for classicists to address major issues in classroom teaching.<sup>20</sup> With the number of centres offering teacher training in Classics having been reduced from twenty-one to two since the early 1970s, and the number of Classics HMIs from eight to none, there is a greater need than ever for a classical organization to take the lead in providing what Sharwood Smith identified as JACT’s key role: ‘helping teachers to recognize and solve their problems: problems which already existed and problems which were about to arise’. There is no shortage of topics

<sup>17</sup> Prof. L. J. D. Richardson, ‘The Classical Association: The First Fifty Years’, in *Jubilee Addresses* (London 1954), 18, emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> M. Schofield, ‘The Recent History of the CA’, in C. Stray (ed.), *The Classical Association: The First Century 1903–2003* (Oxford, 2003), 71.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> These would supplement the practical support offered in different ways by the Association for Latin Teaching, the Cambridge School Classics Project and, more recently, the Classics Library web site.

for debate. One such is the future of Greek: in the last two months two of the handful of state schools still offering Greek – one grammar school and one comprehensive – have announced their intention to drop the subject at A-Level from this summer, yet at the same time it has now become possible to study Greek at primary level as part of the national curriculum (although, under the latest revision of the national curriculum, *any* language, ancient or modern, may be offered). What can be done to support state schools still offering Greek A-Level? What online resources can/should be developed to support the learning of Greek in primary schools? What sort of progression can/should be offered to primary-school pupils wishing to continue their studies at secondary school? What are the implications for the subject if it is available at A-Level only in independent schools? In the current climate it might be unrealistic to run a two-day meeting but a one-day conference for twenty to thirty invited specialists from schools and universities, with keynote presentations later published in either the *Journal of Classics Teaching* or *Greece & Rome* (both have their advantages), could explore these and many more questions, and provide a clear framework for wider debate; and a working party could then be formed to generate specific proposals which might, in time, lead to concrete outcomes. The conference would need, however, to be more inclusive than its predecessors in two important respects: first, women must be much better represented (only three women – one schoolteacher and two Education lecturers – attended the Ancient History conferences in 1964–5); secondly, delegates need to be drawn from right across the increasingly broad spectrum of schools and colleges where Classics is taught.

Another simple way to preserve JACT's legacy would be to republish in *Greece & Rome* one *Didaskalos* article a year from fifty years earlier. *Didaskalos* 1.3 (1975) would certainly provide a good range of articles to choose from: it includes, *inter alia*, Finley and Haworth's thoughts on Ancient History in the senior forms (based on their contributions to the Ancient History conferences); a discussion of the implications on the oral approach to modern language teaching by C. V. Russell, a lecturer in the teaching of modern languages; and an article by Michael McCrum, at the time Headmaster of Tonbridge School, on Classics in the 1960s. This last was the third in a series of six articles by different contributors under the title 'A Theory of Classical Education', all of which should be required reading for anyone involved in Classics education, whether at school or university level.

Finally, because recruiting and retaining members is so important (it was JACT's failure to do this, after all, which led to its demise) and because electronic communication is now so pervasive, the CA needs to review the purpose and administration of its website. Erstwhile members of JACT will find little on the current website to encourage them to join the Association, not least because they will soon realize that its content is not regularly updated.<sup>21</sup> Visiting the Governance page, for example, after pausing perhaps to note the preponderance of university representatives on the Council, they will find that the dates given for the next meetings of the Council, the Finance Committee, and the Journals Board have all passed; looking at the Publications page, they will see that, three months after the official merger of the CA and JACT, neither *Omnibus* nor the *Journal of Classics Teaching* is listed among the CA's journals. What is likely to strike them above all, however, is the absence of even a passing reference to the merger with JACT on the home page. What better way to mark that significant event than the development of a new website to promote the sort of lively discussion and debate that epitomized JACT's early history?

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<sup>21</sup> <<http://www.classicalassociation.org>>, accessed 30 March 2015.