

Chair of the Association 2007-2008

I remember my chemistry teacher at school festooning the laboratory with damp postal orders – he was Treasurer of the Science Masters Association (which later amalgamated with the corresponding ‘female’ organisation to form the ASE) and found that many members incorrectly signed the postal orders for their subscriptions in the space intended for the recipient’s signature. Rather than get involved in sending them back, he bleached the signature and dried them out before paying them into the Association bank account. How things have changed! In those days, the volunteer officers carried out many of the tasks we now have paid staff to do (although I don’t imagine they bleach many postal orders these days! Postal orders, incidentally, do still exist). But what has not changed is that the ASE provides vital support, fellowship and influence for science educators, extending now to primary teachers, technicians, advisers, inspectors and more.

When I drifted into chemistry teaching, ‘while I decided what I really wanted to do’, it never occurred to me not to join the ASE, and the friendships I made helped me to decide that I had indeed found ‘what I wanted to do’. My career from then on was fairly conventional, culminating, via head of department and head of sixth form posts, in school headship. When I became a headteacher, several ASE friends asked whether I intended to continue in membership – I had not thought of leaving (nor of giving up actual teaching), though pressure of work kept me from activity at national level, until I took early retirement and launched into membership of a national committee (Publications) of which I became Chairman and, now, (it still seems hard to believe), Chair of the whole organisation.

Chairing the ASE is a three-year sentence – as Chair-elect, Chair, and Immediate Past-Chair – so one becomes fairly familiar with its sometimes intricate working, having the chance to

work as a team with other senior members, both elected and employed, under the guidance of the elected Council. My immediate predecessors have made great steps forward – notably, by establishing the Chartered Science Teacher qualification. We recently celebrated the second group of new CSciTeach-ers, and are busy with further applicants. The award should be within the reach of any science teachers who work hard to further their own professional competence, yet rigorous enough to be a real achievement.

Our hardworking staff (see <http://www.ase.org.uk/html/thease/asehq.php>), led by Professor Derek Bell, Chief Executive, provide the energy and expertise to make the ASE a powerful force in education, listened to with respect by Government and others.

For me, the main reasons for being an ASE member started out as the personal ones of meeting other science teachers, exchanging ideas and forming friendships. All this still applies, but now I equally value the strength of the Association in influencing the direction of educational development. We do not win every battle on science educators’ behalf, but we do have a voice that is listened to and, without ASE, who would speak for us?

Big challenges lie ahead, including the reform of curricula, the drive for ‘personalised learning’ (which means very different things to different people) and the *Building Schools for the Future* initiative – will architects’ ideas of learning environments correspond with the needs of a science education that is based firmly, as I believe it should be, on practical experience by pupils, not just simulations and presentations, desirable though these are, as part of the learning process?

As members (and, dear reader, I hope you *are* a member, not just reading a borrowed or online copy!), our very presence adds to the numbers for whom ASE speaks, and therefore to its influence. Going to meetings, responding



Graham Kingsley

to consultations, helping organise events locally or nationally – these are all activities rewarding in themselves, as well as increasing our effectiveness. You can help the ASE and do your colleagues a favour by encouraging them to join.

I hope to meet many more of you during the next year – and ask you to join me in making the ASE even better known amongst those it seeks to help.

Wearing other hats... Graham’s other activities include being chair of a secondary school governing body, a governor of a primary and a trustee of an educational charity; teaching Victorian-style lessons at a former school, now a heritage centre; canal boating; travel, theatre, reading and classical music (as listener, not performer!)

His wife, Catherine Wilmers, is a professional cellist; their daughter, Heather, has just graduated in Geography, and their son, Martin, will start a university Civil Engineering course this Autumn.