

Speech by Ingrid Fiske (aka Ingrid de Kok) at Hugh Amoore's farewell, 12 December 2015

Hugh, Kate, Ruth, Bulelani, Mrs Amoore, and university colleagues

I am delighted to have the opportunity to thank you, Hugh, for your friendship of over thirty years and to reflect a little about what combination of unusual characteristics, what stamp of mind, makes you such an irreplaceable colleague and dear friend.

I first met Hugh in the mid-eighties, those heady days when the country was poised to change despite intensifying state repression. As co-ordinator of Sached's Khanya College, my work involved facilitating access to the "white" universities of black students who had completed a limited number of courses at Khanya. Hugh was an exemplary and practical force for change, the most imaginative of all the administrators I dealt with. He was adroit in reading UCT's existing rules as flexible tools for the mobility of black students, and formulated an agreement that was respectful, rigorous, and administrable. (Stuart Saunders, Ian Scott and Jon File also played an honourable part in this, a period when what was then ASP began to experiment with new models of access.) It was my first experience of an administrator who understood detail not as an end in itself but as a means to a considered whole, in this case a more inclusive, equitable academic community.

All my other formal dealings with Hugh have had that same quality. While famously protective of UCT's history, standards and regulations, he always seemed to express that commitment as an ethical duty within a larger humanist and political frame.

When I moved to direct the Centre for Extra Mural Studies in what was then the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, Hugh's careful advice to a seemingly peripheral initiative was once again critical. Influenced by precedents in our own and in other institutions, particularly those in the UK that had extended access after the Second World War, he believed then, and I think now, that a university needs to make space for odd, experimental clusters and cross-disciplinary units in order to generate and maintain lively intellectual and community engagement.

And even in the recent turmoil, after a hostile physical confrontation with an angry group of students, he took the historical perspective. He spoke movingly of the need to keep the university a sanctuary for student protest, reminding me of how the University of Bologna's medieval arcades and quads had been so valuable in keeping students at a protective distance from civic factions and their armed proxies. To maintain the long, depersonalised view, even in times of stress, is quite remarkable.

Others with much more experience of working closely with Hugh have spoken of the range of his capacities – his financial, legal and archival knowledge, high standards – and that unrelenting work ethic, perhaps never to be seen again (possibly to the relief of many!).

Mine instead is the reflection of a friend. Despite his work load and family responsibilities, Hugh has been a constant, generous friend to me and my husband Tony Morphet. His wit, clarity, unusual range of knowledge, and belief in the basic goodness of people despite much evidence to the contrary, has enriched me and his other friends. It was Cicero who said: "Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief." Hugh has doubled my joy and divided my grief over decades.

Our invitations to this event arrived in the form of a fake UCT stamped and post marked envelope, with the registrar's face upon it. But it was not posted, we received it through that faster service, email, and the number on the stamp, 29, indicates not the cost of the stamp but the cost to Hugh – the number of years he has been UCT's Registrar.

Most of you know that Hugh is a philatelist. But perhaps you thought it a quirky old-fashioned hobby. Instead it might help to understand it as a rarefied passion, as strong an indicator of his personality and work habits as his handwriting. Philately is not just the study of stamps and related items such as stamped envelopes, covers, postmarks and different printing methods. It is an exercise in classification; a taxonomy of similarity and difference. It requires one to sort, select, order and grade, by looking at first occurrences or prototypes as precedents or standards, and then to observe variations of the pattern. And our philatelist registrar, that institutional amalgam of high-level administrator, record keeper, regulator, archivist, prophet and sometime irritant, is always interested in variation, the exception that proves the rule.

Philatelists classify, but they also study postal and fiscal history. Hugh is an authority on the history of the postal service in South Africa, particularly the Cape. How is this for arcana – one of Hugh's recent articles in the *Cape and Natal Philatelic Journal* is entitled: "CGH: Redirection and Official Redirection of Mail to 1911: Vol. 15 no 1." 10 pages of that! Don't ask me what that is about. But you can be sure that it is a fastidious unearthing of something rich and strange.

So philately turns out to be a perfect vehicle for Hugh, as collector and administrator. It yokes his scholarly interests to his skill in clarifying the meaning of minutiae, those details which reveal historical shifts, retard change, or accelerate it. That carefully phrased item 9.3.56 in an agenda or minute is worthy of very close study; upon it might hang the death of Caesar, the firing of a finance minister, or the closing of a faculty. For Hugh, particulars are the engines of local and wider history and sub-clauses are not pedantic fragments but essential clarifications or extensions of meaning.

Hugh's intelligence therefore is of that disconcerting forensic type. A detective in a bow tie, his mind enjoys uncovering and dissecting evidence in order to find out not "who done it" but "how it was or can be done. " When he looks at a stamp or envelope, or the logic or legal consequence of a decision or rule, Hugh considers the perforations, the notches, differences to the original – or to use different language, the birthmarks, scars and moles. Stamps are compasses and beacons. So are regulations. They hide secret trails, reveal dead ends, and shape new directions.

As a notary Hugh has stamped many documents for individuals; we also have his stamp as Registrar on title deeds, university policies and other matters of record. His stamp gave security, held us to the veracity of discussions and decisions, delivered a guarantee that UCT is what it says it is. Not only Detective Inspector Amoore, he has been UCT's stamp and receipt, Minotaur and mint.

There are of course other, more ambiguous meanings of the word 'stamp' that might or might not refer to his personal style. One can "stamp on" and "stamp out" (and sometimes when vexed I believe Hugh did huff and puff, stamp on the ground metaphorically at least). But you can be sure he never was "a rubber stamp".

As I said earlier, philately is also about circulation, public and private communication. Imagine receiving this letter, the kind Hugh used to send regularly to apartheid government officials in

Pretoria. One from February 1982 found its way into my docket. Addressed to “*Professor Dr PJ Clase, MP, Minister of Education in the House of Assembly (whites),*” – the ‘whites’ emphasised to make the obvious point about apartheid nomenclature, it begins: *Dear Minister,*

Then the body of the message follows. And then it ends, not with “*ek bedank die minister*” nor a craven “*thank you so much for even reading this*” nor the conventional “*I remain your servant*” but a deep and radical imperative of accountability and democracy:

You remain, Sir, our most obedient servant ...

Yours faithfully

Hugh Amooore

We know that only if the government is a servant of the people can we be faithful citizens. Hugh has always believed that he is a servant, the university’s servant, there to safeguard and advance its interest, which is to say, its fiduciary standing and intellectual mission – the work of its academics, students and support staff. He seldom made the mistake of thinking administration was a world unto itself – he understood the registrar’s office as a service department, a high-level department, to be sure, but not the Politburo.

You have been a loyal friend, Hugh, to me and many others, and you have been an unusually constant, intelligent, faithful servant to, and savant of, UCT, your beloved stamping ground. Thank you. You must be very tired. Enjoy your retirement, your dear family, and your philatelic research. And redirect all mail.