

## **Classics in Communities**

**a podcast with Arlene Holmes-Henderson and May Musié**

**introduced by Claire Barnes**

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### **Claire Barnes**

Hello, everybody and welcome to the latest edition of *Staging the Archive*, the APGRD podcast. I'm Claire, I'm one of the archivists, and it's a huge pleasure to be joined by Arlene Holmes Henderson and Mai Musié today to discuss Classics in Communities - a project which some of you will be very familiar with, some of you less so. So we'll be looking forward to introducing you to some of the amazing work that the project has been doing and continues to do. And as our item to kick start this conversation, we have library items. So the volume entitled *Forward with Classics, Classical Languages in Schools and Communities*, co edited by Arlene and Mai as well as Steven Hunt. We'll be diving into the details of that volume shortly. A quick introduction to both our guest speakers today. Arlene read Classics at St Hilda's Oxford before moving on to post grad research at Harvard. She then returned to the UK to complete her PGCE at Trinity Cambridge and has a significant amount of experience in both teaching at school level and working in universities. She also has a doctorate in education from the University of Glasgow. She now sits on a number of qualification advisory boards and curriculum design councils, and has recently gained more of an international remit as outreach officer for the Classical Association. It's also a huge pleasure to be joined by Mai who is currently Public Engagement Manager at Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford. She also has a significant amount of experience in education, particularly outreach work with higher education institutions and statutory bodies. Her academic background also tailors really nicely with this. She studied Classical Civilization and Ancient History, went on to complete a PhD in Greek literature, and her particular area of focus is race and ethnicity in the ancient Greek novels, so a huge welcome to both of you. So I'll hand

over to both of you in a moment, as listeners to the podcast will be aware, we usually start by looking at our visual prompts, which then kick starts the rest of the conversation. So I'll ask you both to cast your minds back to 2018 when your volume was published, so we're looking at the cover here. And I must confess, I wasn't actually familiar with the image selected, but me tells me is there a significance behind its selection.

**Mai Musié**

Yes, actually it might be down to our publisher, Bloomsbury, who suggested the idea. I think, there were several images. Yes. So we chose that one because, you know, it sort of inspired teaching and the sort of nurturing aspect of Chiron who was a very famous tutor in the ancient world, he was a centaur. And this image represented him teaching Achilles, the Greek hero. So we decided that actually, out of all the sort of images that we had, that would be actually quite relevant, because it kind of fed into the sort of teaching but in a nurturing way. And we were thinking more of like, reaching out to, you know, sort of different communities in a nurturing way. So I think we decided it would probably be the best image than all the other ones. I can't actually remember the other ones unless Arlene remembers but but that one was, you know, one that jumped out.

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

I remember we were given some very brightly coloured images, some were quite garish. Yes. And I think we thought that the colour palettes of this one was altogether more attractive. And having an image that represented teaching and learning was very important to us, because the book is about innovative approaches to teaching and learning and classical studies in the 21st century. So the cover rubric, I think, needs to indicate what is on the inside. So this fresco does a really good job of showing people that it's about teaching and learning, I think so that's why we went with this one.

**Claire Barnes**

And who was your ideal audience for this? You know, if you did you have a particular particular person in mind or particular community in mind, you thought would benefit...

### **Mai Musié**

When we envisaged the project, I think we wanted to base it in terms of academic research work, however, our audience would be predominantly non academic within the higher education sector. So reaching out really to, you know, to schools, teachers, community leaders, you know, just people who perhaps would not normally be kind of within the framework of higher education. So, you know, that was at the beginning, our kind of core audiences, and particularly teachers from primary and secondary schools.

### **Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Yeah, and I guess it may be quite helpful now to sketch a little bit about what the aims of the project are. So, back in 2014, there was a curriculum policy change in England and Wales, where, for the first time, it was thought to be acceptable, possibly even advisable for children aged six to 11 (that's Key Stage 2) to learn ancient languages. So Latin and Greek were explicitly written into the languages curriculum at Key Stage 2 as languages which were thought suitable for study alongside modern languages. And so at that point, the Classics and Communities project was born, founded by Mai.

And the project had twin aims, firstly, to offer training, because we were acutely aware that there were many teachers in primary schools, educating children aged six to 11, who themselves had not had the opportunity to study Latin and Greek at school. So great, we've got some policy support. But in practice, we can't enact that policy, because the knowledge is simply not there. So Classics and humanities offered a number of training sessions, workshops for teachers, in order to teach Latin in the morning, Greek in the afternoon, followed up by some professional mentoring and support to make that policy change a reality for teachers in primary schools across England and Wales. And in fact, we've extended it to Northern Ireland and Scotland

because we did not want young people across other parts of the UK to miss out. But secondly, and this is where I come in, we also had a research arm to the project. So what we found was that school leaders would say, ancient languages are not available as an option in the Key Stage 2 languages policy, why would we introduce Latin on our curriculum? Where is the evidence? So the research arm of the project has been running a five year longitudinal study, to collect data in order to investigate what impact does the learning of ancient languages have on children's cognitive development. So I was recruited by the Classics and Communities project as a research fellow in Classics education in 2014. And I have been working with Mai to run those training sessions for teachers across the country, but also to design and lead this research study in Classics education, so that we have an evidence base with which to help school leaders and school teachers understand what are the benefits of ancient languages beyond the anecdotal evidence, which has been in circulation for decades.

### **Mai Musié**

And, and I was just thinking about the origin of the project. And thanks, Arlene, for giving me all the credit, it was, I have to say, further members, who came up with the initial proposal, Evelyn Brath, from Swansea University, and Lorna Robinson from the Iris Project. So we saw, you know, what the horizon looked like, with the changes that were coming in, in 2014. And this was, you know, our kind of planning meeting in 2013. Thinking, well, we need to do something, because clearly, we've got this really great opportunity to bring Classics through, in some sense, the back door. But, you know, we need to think about upskilling school teachers, this is a great opportunity, but we do need some support for this. And who better than Oxford, to lead on it, for example, because they do have a very strong voice in these sort of things. And yeah, so we had that initial discussion with Evelyn and Lorna in a pub on a summer's day, in 2013, and then it's sort of springboarded really from that, I think the most important aspect was to recognise that we weren't the sort of ideal candidates to push forward, the sort of research side and the kind of taking on the teaching the training to teachers, we needed an expert. And

that's when Arlene came in. And she kind of blew everyone away in that interview with myself, and Felix Budelmann and Anna Clark, and we thought she was absolutely perfect to take on that project. And she's done absolutely amazing work since then. And then, you know, with the contribution by the Iris Project, you know, we started working with them in terms of data gathering and also through children's lighting literacy programmes, such as the Latin programme based in London. So we started really scoping other partners to work with, and Cambridge University came on board, they supported us with financial aid, but it wasn't much. But you know, that's how the project really survived by not very much, you know, it was that kind of initial money from the University, Oxford University. And, you know, sort of things like the John Bell fund, Cambridge University, and then we had great contribution by Steve Hunt from the Faculty of Education in Cambridge. And he came on to the project, and sort of him and Arlene really kind of pushed the project on to the sort of second and third stage. So even though it was quite a small project, in terms of monetary framework, it attracted a lot of attention. And at our first initial conference, we were surprised by the response that we had; we expected it to be quite sort of, you know, not just regional, but actually within the UK. And when we started getting inquiries internationally, we thought, oh, gosh, this is a surprise, but also a fantastic opportunity to see what the landscape was the landscape of plastics, internationally. And so that's how we framed the first initial conference as an international conference. And that really was a springboard for the international focus of this. And then since then, we had a second and third conference. And that brought in itself wider international awareness.

### **Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Yeah. And people who are looking at the contents of the book will see that we have contributors from Australia, from Brazil, from across Europe, from South Africa, from Ireland. And following up the international collaboration we did for the book I have had two subsequent visiting professorships, one with the University of Canterbury Christ Church in New Zealand, where I did a collaborative research project on the role of Classics in the curriculum in New

Zealand schools and in British schools, and have a publication out and a New Zealand book about that. And I have another collaborative research project from the Oxford Africa project; a visiting professorship with the University of Stellenbosch. And just last summer, Mai and I worked with a group of students and their professor from the Netherlands from the Oikos Project, who looked to Classics in Communities as an example of good practice in Classics education, research and outreach, looking to inform the reform of Classics education and teacher training and the Netherlands. So Mai is quite right: Classics in Communities is a project which has been run on a shoestring budget. Unfortunately, Classics education as a field is not really recognised, I would say either by Classics (because I feel like, you know, we're not really recognised as being proper Classics) and we're not really recognised by education because Classics exists very much on the periphery. So I think Classics education is absolutely a growing field and even in the year since I've done my doctorate, I've now examined people's doctorates in Classics education, so you know there still aren't 10 of us in the world to have done doctorates in Classics education. But you know, we're approaching 10. And so I think we are growing fields, but you know, we're still drastically under funded. And so for a project which has attracted not a lot of funding, I think we can be proud of the amount of impact we've had not just in the UK, but increasingly internationally.

### **Claire Barnes**

Yeah, sort of outreach in its truest sense, is what you're what you're describing. And your point about international work. It's quite an interesting one. Obviously, as you say, even though in terms of funding perhaps Classics education is a niche concern, there seems to be a quite a lot of hand wringing about the the state of Classics teaching in Britain - you know, our current prime minister, unfortunately, is part of that. But in your in your work and in your consequent job opportunities following on from the publication of the book, as a risk of making generalisations are their particular national curricula that you feel are addressing the situation well, or more admirably, than

others? Have you noticed any patterns in how classic teaching is approached?

### **Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

So I think there are a couple of national curricula which are leading the way in terms of providing democratic access to the study of Greeks and Romans and schools. One is Denmark, where the study of the Greeks and Romans appears from the research I've done to be available to students in secondary fields, as as a mainstream subject. Equally in New Zealand, classical studies, is recognised as an English rich subject. So just my personal perspective: students who are a bit fed up of studying English, and the final phases of secondary age education, can substitute assessment in English for another English rich subject, and many of them choose Classical Studies. And so Classical Studies is taught in a huge number of state secondary schools across New Zealand, and I've written about this, I've published about this, and I did look at New Zealand as a as an example of really good practice in the learning and teaching, particularly, of classical studies - so the access of the ancient world in English. However, earlier this year, New Zealand's qualification assessment authority scaled back their support to assessment in classical studies, and particularly in Latin, so I'm a little bit disappointed that it appeared that at the lower levels of assessment, that support seems to be waning a little bit - so that that does concern me. But yes, those two areas, I think, definitely are worthy of admiration. There are, of course, other national curricula where this study of the ancient world is freely available to all students and certain types of schools. So if you look at the German gymnasium system, or the Dutch gymnasium system, or in Italy the Liceo Classico, of course, all students have access to the study of usually Latin and Greek, and access to the study of the ancient world in some form, whether it's a discrete subject, or whether it is an addendum to the study of Latin and Greek languages. So the book, which I'm currently writing, will include some international comparative research on exactly this topic.

### **Claire Barnes**

Sounds very exciting; you'll have to get back in touch when that's nearing publication, we can have you back again! I was interested when you discussed the idea of classical studies as a sort of more accessible option. And there might well be people listening who work in schools and are interested in introducing classical subjects, and classical studies is obviously more feasible considering staffing constraints in certain schools. And obviously, there is there is a bit of snobbery, particularly at university level, about which path somebody has taken to approach their Classics degree. And that kind of classical studies versus the sort of, yeah, kind of 'traditional', 'gentleman's' education in Latin and Greek education is often held up. I guess an obvious concern is that this would then lead somebody to think well, why bother? (Which I don't personally think they should think!) But what might your your response to that be? You know, if you can't do it in the original why do it at all?

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Wow, what a question!

**Claire Barnes**

Let's confirm. This is not my thought, but it's something I've had levelled at me, so...

**Mai Musié**

well, I guess I can only speak from my own experience. And I suppose I'm the perfect example really, of somebody who never really had opportunities to study Classics at school. I went to a secondary school in South London, in the Borough of Lambeth, and it was an extremely poor school. And so you know, getting good GCSE results was certainly an achievement. And so for me, the only way that I was introduced to Classics was through myth and through my own kind of extracurricular learnings, and it wasn't until Sixth Form college that I started doing Egyptology as an extra curricular activity. So then I took on A Cevel English, Politics and History with the view to do law. In University, that's one of the three subjects that perhaps immigrant families always tend

to, you know, sort of move towards. So I didn't really have an opportunity, even in college, to think about Classics until English when I was studying set texts in English. And we came across Tom Stoppard's plays, particularly *Arcadia*. And that kind of opened the world for me. And then there was an opportunity to go to a classical excursion trip to Greece, which, you know, I begged my mother to provide the funds. And I had an eight amazing days in Greece, I came back and I started thinking about Classics instead of, you know, doing Law, and I ended up in Swansea University doing a Classical Civilization degree, which, you know, to gave me an opportunity to choose the languages as an option. So I started off with Greek and then in my master's, I went to choose Latin. And, you know, I studied Ancient History for my masters. And it wasn't until PhD that basically, I kind of concentrated on the languages. And I think, you know, I knew I was different.

In a room full of 60 students in the lecture hall, I was visibly different but I was also different in the sense that I didn't have Classics in my background. However, I think it was an incredibly nurturing department in Swansea University. And so I was able to look beyond that. And, you know, since then I've started thinking about how Classics has actually made me get in touch with my own cultural heritage. I'm from an Ethiopian-Eritrean background, and it started making me think about how ancient Ethiopia has kind of contributed to the greater human civilization, and the kind of connectivity between Greece and Rome and Persia and North East Africa. And in some ways, the more I got into the Greek novels, the more I got the opportunity to see those connectivities and I suppose that kind of made me realise, you know, living in the UK with your identity, and particularly being of an ethnic minority background, you know, sort of having this subject which is predominantly white, and middle class and usually kind of male-centred, and very Eurocentric, somehow the texts themselves opened up the world around me. And it was a fantastic way to see the connections between my own background and the Greeks and Romans. And having realised that the modern teaching of Classics is problematic. And the best way that we can try and move on from this is actually to have, you know, the sort of

interconnectivity more pronounced: to not concentrate purely on the languages so that you could alienate a lot of interested students, but also think about, you know, actually the ancient world belongs to everybody. And, you know, people can identify with any and every aspect of it. I don't think that comes across very well in the modern setting, particularly in the European setting in schools. I spend a lot of my time now talking about ancient and modern comparisons, but also about empowering people, particularly from a non white background, those who've been to state schools, etc. to say, look, let's look at the ancient world, in all of its glory, and connect that with other parts of the world. Because if I can do it, and that was when I was going to university in the 90s and early 2000s, when it was so much harder, then anyone can do it.

### **Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Thank you. Thank you, Mai. And yes, I am a huge ambassador for Classical languages, I was lucky enough to study Latin at school and Greek on a summer school. And I will always defend their place in the school curriculum. But I fundamentally oppose this dichotomy between Classical languages, and the study of the ancient world and translation. And I think that we have to move away from this idea that there is more merit in studying one rather than the other because that is fundamentally untrue. And I challenge anyone who believes that Classical languages are in any way better or harder than the study of Classical Civilization and Ancient History at GCSE or A Level to look at the specification documents for Classical Civilization and Ancient History; have a look at what it is students of those courses actually have to study. Look at past papers, I guarantee you that having done that process, you will come away, re educated. We need to put this to bed. Let's move on. Classical languages, Ancient History, and Classical Civilization are all meritorious. We need to get young people access to the study of the ancient world in some form, if that is what they wish, let's work together collaboratively across the sector to make that possible.

### **Mai Musié**

Absolutely right. I can't add anything more to what Arlene has actually said. I think it should be that if we're truly thinking of democratising Classics, that the only way that we could do it is to step away from our own little kind of fiefdoms and territories and pitting each other. "Oh, yes, you went to Oxbridge, and you didn't go to Oxbridge or you didn't do languages, and you did Class. Civ.". It's just taking it back step really. And when I was trying this project, and also working in the Classics department in, in Oxford University, I didn't realise that, actually, as a Classics community, we can come together. And because I suppose our subject has been on the periphery, and for so long, that we have weathered the storm a bit better than other subjects, by being on the periphery, and constantly on the attack, you know, being attacked. For its lack of relevance in the modern world, and so forth. So, you know, this filled me with so much positivity, that we can actually work together, regardless of our kind of educational upbringing. But there are still some really hard mountains to climb sometimes. And it feels as if that were constantly, you know, just battling each other.

### **Claire Barnes**

Definitely agreed. And this conversation has been a wonderful breath of fresh air, which is perhaps indicative of how many more mountains there are to climb. And I'm sure a lot of a lot of people listening to this as, as I am myself, are Reception studies people. And if Reception teaches you anything, it's that there are lots of different voices exploring the Classics in lots of different ways. It's just that they've not necessarily always been amplified, as you say, alongside quite a narrow view of what it means to have a legitimate interaction with with these texts. So yeah, anything that that can be done to fix that is wonderful. Just looking at the title of the book, and it's not so much "Classics in Communities", as "Classics as a community", this particular argument. This is perhaps a really good time to start looking forward. So you've spoken about the the state of Classics education as you initially encountered it, you described the the 2018 publication as a sort of legacy of the work that had been done up until that point. So I guess the natural progression is having having addressed these Classical cynics and having put the work in and

gathered the data, where is the project currently moving? Where do you see your next mountains to climb?

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

So I'm, I'm still gathering data, because it's really important when we're doing any educational research study, to have enough data for the study, to stand up to scrutiny, and to be robust enough that you can extrapolate findings, which can be communicated with a certain amount of confidence. So yeah, the data collection and analysis is ongoing. But I'm really pleased that I have now established an official partnership called a Research and Public Policy partnership with the Department for Education. So that means I will be working from now until July 2021, with officials in the Humanities and Languages curriculum policy team, and the Department for Education to share my research, data and findings today, specifically around the learning and teaching of ancient languages and skills across England and Wales. And that is to help professionals in the Department for Education understand what is happening in terms of ancient language teaching, but also to hopefully move towards more effective policy enactment and policy delivery. And, let's say, better communication between policymakers and those working in the fields of ancient language education, about key issues facing learning and teaching.

**Mai Musié**

Yeah, we're pretty excited that Arlene's hard work is absolutely paying off. And, you know, obviously, when we first recruited her, as I said, she kind of blew the competition away the interview stage, and then we had no idea that she had so much expertise, and, you know, she was an extremely motivated person. So in a way, in the last few years, it's really kind of been Arlene's work rather than any of us, you know, we've sort of just of been in the background, but she's really pushed the project forward. So much, you know, more than we could possibly have envisaged. And I suppose that's the beauty of it, that, you know, it was a very kind of organic project, we may have had a few kind of frameworks to begin with, but we never really envisaged that it would ever

be to this point where we are having direct dialogue with the Department for Education, and, you know, impacting policy. And, you know, Arlene, probably won't tell you, but she put forward an application for the Vice Chancellors awards, in education at Oxford University and the project won, so I'm absolutely delighted that her work has been recognised on a university level too, as well as internationally. It's just taking the next step in trying to perhaps sustain and build a legacy and making sure that change does happen. But we can't do that on our own. I mean, we've also worked outside the project in order to keep the project going: I had a full time job and trying to do it within my job, Steve has a full time job, and Arlene has other job constraints on her time and so forth. So this is when we were discussing about the kind of monetary stuff you know, it been on a shoestring. It's also been in terms of staff resources, us doing this outside our own kind of core activities. So you can now imagine if we actually had some proper funding of what we could have possibly achieved, but I don't know, I don't know whether we would have been, we could have achieved more than what is now that we have achieved. I think despite all the constraints, we have managed to achieve more than what I thought possible. So much of the work now, and the last few years has certainly been because of our needs motivation. And, you know, that's sort of kudos to her.

**Claire Barnes**

That involvement at policy level is, as you say, a fantastic opportunity, and so exciting to hear how that's moving. And additional question, perhaps looking at a more individual level: as somebody who also went to a state school and did Greek in their lunch break, I know the value of having any support in your school. So if there's anybody listening who's keen to explore the introduction of a classical subject, whether that be a language or something like Class. Civ. or Ancient History in their school, what practical steps would you invite them to take to get that rolling?

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

So I recommend that you visit the Classics in Communities website, because on our website we have our guide to getting started. And that is specifically designed for teachers who want to introduce the teaching of Classics at primary or a secondary level. So that will take them through the steps. If they are looking for funding, they should contact Classics for All, and Mai is a trustee of Classics for All so I'll let her say a little bit more about that.

**Mai Musié**

And yes, so I recently - well, I say recently, I think last year - one of the new trustees for Classics for All. This is a national charity for Classics in schools and gives grants to state schools so that their students can benefit from the introduction of Latin, Greek, Classical Civilization and Ancient History. And it's been going for over over 10 years and supported over 800-odd schools. So you can imagine how many students have been impacted by their intervention. So if you are looking for financial aid, there is the bigger Classics for All charity, but there are also other charitable bodies who can support with small to medium grants as well, but you can find all the information on our website.

**Claire Barnes**

Brilliant. Well, thank you so much to both of you for a really fascinating and exciting conversation. We look forward to hearing your further updates, as I'm sure there will be many. If listeners would like to get in touch with Mai or Arlene they're both on Twitter: Arlene is at @DrArleneHH and Mai is @Dr\_MaiMusie. You can also get in touch with the project itself so on Twitter @ClassicsInComm or the Facebook group, Classics in Communities. If anyone would like to check out the book we mentioned at the beginning of the podcast as well it is published by Bloomsbury: *Forward With Classics: Classical Languages in Schools and Communities* (published 2018).

**Mai Musié**

Available in all good book shops!

**Claire Barnes**

...and the APGRD library if you want to consult a copy!

Thank you so much to both of you.

**Arlene Holmes-Henderson**

Thank you very much. Thank you for the invitation.