

Dr Barry Thomas shares his memories of the University of York, during our 60th year.



Dr Barry Thomas, wearing a Vanbrugh College tie, during a University of York event in 2021.

My name is Barry Thomas. I am still a member of the University of York, though one of the earliest graduates. I have held many roles in the last 60 years, student, teacher, college principal and even rugby team mate. This year we are celebrating York's 60th anniversary, and I have been reflecting on my own experiences and memories.

I arrived on campus as a chemistry lab technician in the summer of 1965, before I began my DPhil in September. **I grew up in Bradford so continuing my education at the newly opened University of York felt very much like coming home.** I was probably the first student to live on campus, though when I opened the door to my Derwent college room that first evening, there was no lightbulb or curtains ... and I was on the ground floor!

I have many memories of the university in the 60s. I remember Queen Elizabeth II officially opening the university in 1965. She was invited to a "tea ceremony" in a current student's bedroom, and a girlfriend's room was picked. However, that plan had to be modified as 'Security' were concerned at the narrowness of the room meaning the Queen would have had to squeeze past my girlfriend's bed with students standing next to it!



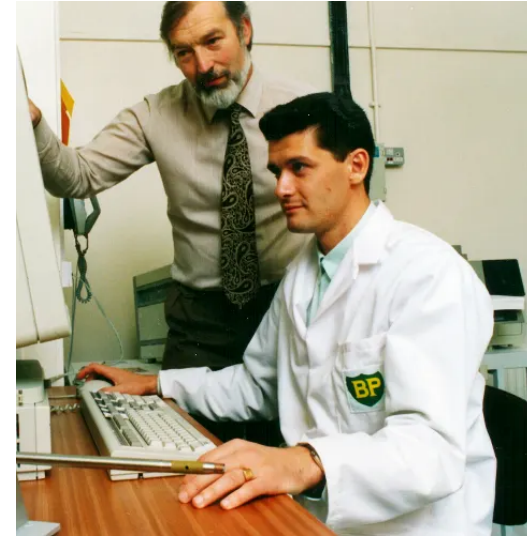
Barry with a Chemistry student Peter, 1978.



Queen Elizabeth II officially opened Derwent & Langwith College, 1965.

I graduated in 1968, in the first graduation ceremony, a huge celebration with all courses and degree levels graduating in a single event. I continued as a teacher and researcher in the Chemistry Department, facing challenges and disruptions like the Chemistry Fire in 1981. Then, at what I expected to be my final event at the university, I was offered the role of Principal of Vanbrugh College, to support the launch of a new college system - a fresh challenge.

One of my fondest contributions from the past 60 years has led to a big part of the university's identity today - the beloved ducks and geese on the campus. When I first arrived, I was disappointed that only farmyard wildfowl had been introduced onto the new lake. I spoke to the Chancellor at the time, Lord James, about introducing wild birds to enable students to see a greater variety of wildlife. I didn't expect any interest but was given £1,000 for our project and we began introducing native wildfowl. In the early days, to help boost the population, we would even hatch abandoned eggs in an incubator and rear the ducklings in an empty fumehood in one of the teaching labs. **Today there are more species than ever across the lakes and wetlands on both campuses.**



Barry and student Eddie.



Cricket Team, (Barry Thomas 5th from left).

I am also looking forward to the future, the opportunities, and the challenges the University of York will surely face in its next 60 years and beyond. I have chosen to pledge a gift in my will to support the welfare and particularly the mental health of future students. My personal experiences over the years have taught me how necessary such effective support is.

- *Dr Barry Thomas.*



The first three D Phil graduates in Chemistry (Barry in the middle), July 1968.



The 1967 Summer Ball, Central Hall Bridge (Barry in the middle).



Black swan on campus, 60s.