

Volume 47 Number 1 Spring 2010

Conference & common room

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Contents

Editorial	5
Letter to the Editor	7
Conference Diary, <i>Emma Taylor</i>	8
New International Members of HMC	52
Management	
Ten for 10/10, <i>Geoff Lucas</i>	10
Jumping through the hoop, <i>Damian Ettinger</i>	12
In the face of an uncertain future, <i>Mick Brookes</i>	13
Making the most of a management review, <i>Adam Pettitt</i>	15
Riskier recruiting, <i>Chris Ramsey</i>	17
Education, education, education? <i>Bernard Trafford</i>	19
Perception	
Farewell Sandy, <i>Miles Petheter</i>	20
Forty days and forty nights, <i>Ian Power</i>	23
Keep marketing! <i>Simon Brindle</i>	24
Heads and headlines, <i>Derek Dyson</i>	25
Health	
Gadarene challenges on Common and Heath, <i>Antony Faccinello & Jenny Stephen</i>	26
Waiting for the barbarians, <i>Stephen Winkley</i>	28
Epidemics in schools: history repeats itself? <i>Nigel Richardson</i>	29
Toughen up in Liverpool, <i>Roger V Mobs</i>	32
Output	
Not for the faint-hearted, <i>April McGoldrick</i>	33
Tower poets in the city of dreaming spires, <i>Peter McDonald</i>	35
For gifted and talented, <i>James Petrie</i>	36
Back to The Old Century? <i>Hugh Wright</i>	38
What to say to our sixth formers, <i>Tim Hands</i>	40
Into Africa, <i>Gardner Thompson</i>	43
Leavers' ties, <i>James Priory</i>	45
Book review	
Fame – from the Bronze Age to Britney, <i>William M Duggan</i>	49
Endpiece	
Gluttony and the senior master, <i>Alistair Macnaughton</i>	54



8



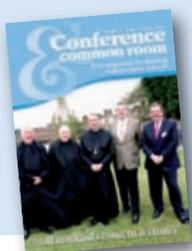
17



24



38



'...all mankind's concern is charity' (Alexander Pope).
See also page 11.

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Publication: Published three times
a year, February, June, September.

Editorial Board: A steering
group of members appointed by
the Headmasters' &
Headmistresses' Conference.

Opinions expressed in *Conference
& Common Room* are not necessarily
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Subscriptions:

£25 for a two year subscription,
post paid; discounts for bulk orders
available. **Advertising** and

Subscription enquiries to the
Business Managers:

John Catt Educational Ltd,
12 Deben Mill Business Centre,
Old Maltings Approach, Melton,
Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1BL.
Tel: (01394) 389850.
Fax: (01394) 386893.
E-mail: enquiries@johncatt.co.uk.
Printed in England by Wyndeham
Grange, Butts Rd, Southwick,
West Sussex, BN42 4EJ.
ISSN 0265 4458

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Welcome to 2010, a year in which we know for certain that there will be a General Election. What we don't know is which party will win or even whether there will be a clear winner. A change of government would surely be beneficial, if only because the present administration seems exhausted and devoid of forward momentum. There are those who believe that Headships should not last for more than ten or 12 years: perhaps the same applies to parties in power.

This comparison brings into focus one of the main political problems of the age – the desire of Prime Ministers to perform as presidents, without being subjected to an appropriate system of checks and balances or a pre-agreed term limit. Our parliamentary system is, quite properly, in disrepute, not because of the 'expenses scandal', but because it has been ignored by successive Prime Ministers and because both Houses appear to be emasculated.

The House of Lords has been half torn down, but still stands tottering gently. The dilemma is clear. Create a new Upper House whose representatives have popular credibility and you create a legislative assembly that might slow a government down or even bring it to a halt, precisely the function of the United States Senate. The currently elected representatives of the people in the House of Commons are less important to ministers than the internet or the *Daily Mail*, a shameful state of affairs, unlikely to be changed unless there is a hung Parliament or something much like it.

And what has this to do with independent schools? In the past, General Elections were occasions for political activity on the part of the independent sector. Ginger groups were formed to put candidates on the spot and to agitate for the preservation of the species. There were even signs that these guerrilla campaigns had some effect. Nowadays the effort is more measured and more consistent.

Through all vicissitudes the ISC has earned the right to a national voice which now speaks with authority and with an increasing level of approval from its constituent bodies. Is there, perhaps, somewhere in ISC headquarters one of those fine wooden boards on which are inscribed the gilded names of those who have led the organisation in the last 35 years? May we learn something from the evolutionary process which took us from Arthur Hearnden, the Admirable Crichton of this particular group, via a political researcher, a lawyer and an admiral, to the once and future diplomat, David Lyscom?

ISC still has political battles to fight and a General Election requires all associations with political objectives to throw their hat into the ring, or, at least, to be seen to have a hat. At 



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present we are much preoccupied by the Charity Commission, but what we must hope for from the next government is a rapid restoration of economic health and a coherent education policy which will be to the benefit of all citizens.

In its turn the independent sector must make good its claims to have a worthwhile role to play in shaping educational policy and practice and in providing opportunities for the disadvantaged. This will require engagement in the debate on the same terms as our opponents or critics. It is true to say that many parents make considerable sacrifices to send their children to independent schools, but it is also true to say that there are many more parents who don't have anything to sacrifice, with children who would benefit from the chances independent schools offer.

The High Master of Manchester Grammar School threw down a gauntlet – only one, he made clear, of a matching pair – to schools as well as to Dame Suzi Leather, when he described the extraordinary efforts that his school makes in and for its community, but the bursary programmes that MGS and other schools are managing are just as remarkable and just as necessary.

Widening access is not only a matter for independent schools. Universities are also engaged in this work and, as a society, we have come a long way, through the tortuous paths of political correctness, to a more tolerant and inclusive society. It is in schools that the social virtues must be taught, together with the flexibility now necessary for a working life that is no longer predictable or even stable.

Political correctness is not entirely without merit if it reminds employers that they should appoint the best person for the job and not the person who best fits the stereotype. In the same way schools should both bear in mind and proclaim that it is the best, that is, the most widely, educated person who will get the most out of work and leisure, whilst contributing the most to society.

We cannot go back to 'the old century' of which Hugh Wright tells us, even if, as Tim Hands confirms, our pupils will not find university cheap. But equally, we should not be herded without protest into the serpentine corridors of over-regulation or become the silent victims of a state drunk with the power the internet confers.

We should protest at the manifest risks of ContactPoint (*sic*), even if by doing so we risk appearing on the list of 'domestic extremists'. We should rail against ill-conceived schemes such as those of the Independent Safeguarding Authority, discussed in Chris Ramsay's article, and we should not excuse disastrous consequences just because they were 'unintended'.

We should be wary of fame, even in the Warhol-approved dose of 15 minutes, and warn our pupils and our staff about the Janus Facebook. We should, in short, make our way in this brave new world with caution and with a strong set of values, because if this example is not set in schools, it is not clear where else such wisdom may be found.

Letter to the Editor

Sir,

I have much sympathy with the open letter from Jonathan Whybrow which appeared in the last issue of *Conference & Common Room*. As a governor of two distinguished preparatory schools, the majority of whose leavers transfer to a wide variety of HMC senior schools, I am well aware of the frustration for heads caused by the variation in attitude towards Common Entrance to be found in senior schools.

The time is ripe for HMC, IAPS and the Common Entrance Board to work together to develop a core curriculum with associated entrance tests that fit the bill.

HMC schools have, over many years, led the way with their involvement in curriculum and qualification development (Nuffield Science, SMP mathematics and, more recently, the Extended Project spring to mind as shining examples) and the time is ripe for similar innovative thinking at 11-13.

So, come on HMC, seize the initiative, take the lead and come up with an 11-13 curriculum that will really excite both preparatory and senior schools. And, whilst you are at it, come up with Common Entrance tests that will be met with universal approval and respect!

Yours faithfully,
Roger Peel (Hon Associate Member)

HMC Conference Diary

Emma Taylor at the Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool



Andrew Grant at the Adelphi.

The theme of this year's conference was tempting: Independence in a Healthy Democracy. In the midst of the party conference season and in the gathering pre-election undercurrent of expectation, there was a palpable sense of the possibility of change.

However, the underlying theme did not take much digging for: it was, of course, the quality of the hotel accommodation. The dear old Adelphi came in for more than its fair share of jibes and wisecracks, culminating in an accolade to which many of us might aspire; to have a poem written in its honour and read to entertain the post-dinner throng on Tuesday night.

However, to restore chronology, the hotel provided this Conference-goer at least with a now familiar routine: the experience of going up and down in lifts and wandering up and down apparently endless softly-carpeted, featureless corridors seeking my room. Being as junior as I am, this is usually above the kitchen and with a fetching view of the breeze-block end of another building six inches from the window. As always, I attempt to look sophisticated and professional while covering at least four sides and possibly five sides of a square before eventually finding the room intended for me. This time I was, by all accounts, lucky.

Clean, comfortable and unencumbered by stale cigarette smoke, my room was just fine. Ablutions were fun; I was slightly bemused by being given a shower cap but no shower,

and taken back to my prep school days upon the delivery from the bath taps of what looked like well-stewed tea. Soaking in it, my inner eye settled on the cute pictures of Betty Boop-like children on the back of every bathroom door at my school, accompanied by Mabel-Lucie Attwell: 'Please remember, don't forget, never leave the bathroom wet...' Eventually I was forced to leave my eight year-old self behind and venture forth to sample the delights of the Conference itself.

Having listened to Doug Muirhead making tax and pensions lively and entertaining (there was real adrenalin involved in his presentation, although it may have been due to terror rather than excitement), I attended a packed Boarding Schools meeting under the watchful eye of Uncle Charlie Bush, who gathered our scattered thoughts on diversity, the Working Time Directive, Vetting and Barring and an update on Eastbourne's famed resistance to the iniquities of inspection.

On the Charities Commission (more of this later), the lovely Geoff Boulton suggested that we, as senior independent schools, could do a good deal to help the beleaguered small prep schools that lack the resources to fund bursaries and meet compliance requirements.

The voice of generosity and reason duly heard, we went on our way rejoicing, to hear the first round of innumerable Beatles references and the resounding voice of the Chairman championing the cause of independence, rallying the troops and

THE HEADMASTERS' & HEADMISTRESSES'
HMC
 CONFERENCE

sending wireless messages winging towards a concurrent conference in Manchester. Invoking Karl Marx and J S Mill in an unlikely libertarian partnership, his speech glittered with literati and finished with a wonderfully wry rewriting of the final chapter of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Stirring and enlivening stuff for us and for the attentive press corps.

Putting together a Conference programme must be a serious headache. After all, we all want something different from our few days away, from practical updates to blue-sky thinking and from models of leadership to pure entertainment. For me, the best sessions were the ones that did what the very best teachers do for their pupils.

They educated and informed with a light touch and delivered their messages without heavy-handedness but with a real sense of joy and enthusiasm. The wonderful Simon Singh was a delight as ever; his serious message about the decline in science education communicated in and through the kind of mind-popping insights that prompted one Headmaster to ask during questions "Do you want a job?" There would be a long queue if he did.

We had to wait for Wednesday for a session that was truly electric in atmosphere; perhaps not surprisingly it was Dame Suzi Leather and the Charities Commission who provided the drama. Dr Chris Ray's emphatic moral victory in citing a list of 'indirect benefits' provided by Manchester Grammar School was worthy of a standing ovation. No sane listener could fail to agree that if ever a school was to pass the public benefit test by means other than direct bursarial support, MGS should have done so. Dame Suzi demonstrated courage, articulacy and reasonableness in her responses and the exhalation of an entire room greeted the news that few, if any, further public benefit assessments of our schools would take place in the following 12 months.

As always, the 'off the ball action' was as important as the programme itself and it was a joy to meet up with friends from past lives and from my own cohort of HMC Heads. It is also good to know that HMC is, in the jargon, 'self-evaluative' and is considering the impression it gives not only externally but internally too. Those of us who were girls in boys' schools in the 80s and now form the 10% of female HMC members actively enjoy the fun of being in the minority, but we will not encourage our boys to join clubs that our girls cannot join, and I hope our professional association feels the same. As we say farewell to a self-confessed rebel in Roger Peel, who will be very sorely missed, it seems healthy that there is still plenty of rebellion and mischief expressed in the bars, and plenty of room to question the organisation itself.

Thanks to the Chairman for a great programme, to the Adelphi for providing us with so much fodder for conversation and particularly to the gentlemen's outfitters who provided such an entertaining range of trows for the Gala dinner. My favourite quote of the week? Actually it was a typo in the AGM papers, which suggested that the choice of a Canary Wharf hotel for next year's Conference was thanks to 'the baking crisis'. Let us hope not, or next year's underlying theme will no doubt be the food.

Emma Taylor is Head of Christ College, Brecon.



Conference Diarist about her task.

Ten for 10/10

Geoff Lucas looks at HMC past, present and future

So, we've made it into 2010! January 1st has come, and gone, without any serious eventuality. (I sincerely hope it has, given the lead time in writing this piece, back in the autumn of 2009!).

Ten years ago, it was a very different story. Anyone old enough to be teaching today will certainly remember where they were and what they were doing as they awaited the reassuring chimes of Big Ben at midnight on New Year's Eve, 1999. To the surprise of some, and relief of most, the millennium bug failed to bite. It became extinct overnight.

Back in 1999, another millennium bug was biting, this time within HMC. In October 1999, the HMC AGM approved a new development plan to take the association into the first decade of the 21st century. It followed several months of intense discussion and review, carried out by the aptly-named 'Millennium Working Party'.

Ten years on, HMC is in the midst of another review, in anticipation of a new development plan, to see us into the next decade. So, how have things changed in the last ten years and are we now in better or worse shape to face the future than then?

A survey of members who were in membership of HMC on (or before) 1st September, 2000, provides some insights. Out of a total membership of some 250, exactly 90 members met this criterion. Of these, 86 (96%) returned questionnaires. Asked whether five key aspects of HMC were now the same, better or worse than ten years ago, these members responded as follows:

	Same	Better	Worse
The internal services and support provided to members	18%	78%	4%
HMC's public and political profile and external influence on educational matters	45%	44%	11%
Benefits to you (as an individual)	47%	46%	7%
Benefits to your school	53%	40%	7%
Overall value for money	53%	38%	9%

It is important, however, to set these findings in context. One member, reflecting on the difficulty involved in making such assessments, astutely observed that: 'HMC has changed, the external context has changed, one's own perceptions and experiences (as an 'old' as opposed to a 'new' Head) have

changed'. Another member commented: 'I thought HMC was doing an excellent job ten years ago and I believe it still is'. To tick the 'same' box was not, therefore, necessarily a criticism.

For the sake of balance (and to avoid accusations of selectivity, complacency or worse) it is also worth quoting one member with a very different perception of HMC. Having railed against the 'expensive and pompous bureaucracy' of the association, he went on to say: 'My general impression is that there is widespread disenchantment'. Fortunately, the overall figures do not bear this out, but there were other important concerns and issues raised by other members which are worth reflecting on. These include (with quotations) the following:

- **The diversity of member schools:** this is both our greatest strength and greatest challenge. It is almost impossible for HMC to please all of its constituents all of the time.
- The **hostile political climate** of the last ten years (which is getting worse).
- A sense that **HMC's public profile** is less strong than it once was 'but that may well be my perception and the passing of time. It would be interesting to see some market research showing the degree of recognition of the brand'.
- The **HMC world has changed.** 'As a large, single sex boarding school, our particular interests are not so well represented now'.
- Early signs of growing **confidence in ISC** and a single body representing the sector (but appreciation of HMC's role in leading the review of ISC).

Perhaps the biggest regret, for many, was the steep decline in collegiality, with falling attendance at some (but not all) Divisional meetings and dinners. One wistful member asked: 'Is it really true we are all busier and more pressurised? I don't think so, it's more a mindset we've been lured into'.

There were, too, many positive and supportive comments, particularly for the work of the HMC secretariat, for personal and professional help, for briefing papers, and for IPD (Independent Professional Development). Even the survey itself was appreciated: 'It's good to see HMC HQ making a direct address to the membership like this'.

Over the course of this year, through Divisions, sub-committees and other meetings and surveys, all members will have a chance to voice their opinions on key aspects of HMC. A paper setting out ten concrete action points for completion by October 2010 (Ten for 10/10) was unanimously endorsed by the 2009 AGM. By the time members meet for the 2010 AGM, the future shape and direction of HMC should be clear.

While looking ahead is always interesting, it is often instructive to look back. A few well-chosen extracts from the 1999 Millennium Working Party Report serve as a timely reminder that, although many things have changed, some have not. The following quotes could just as easily have come from the 2009 survey, as from its precursor ten years before. For example, on relations with GSA which, in that era, were becoming more intimate and paving the way for subsequent joint sub-committees:

Even though amalgamation with GSA may seem theoretically desirable, it cannot be a short-term goal since, with GSA promoting single-sex education for girls and HMC supporting co-education, there is a fundamental conflict of aims, and it is hard to see how this may be overcome.

Ten years ago, there was also lively debate (and concern) about the role of the Chairman, about the growing burden of the job, and the problems of discontinuity within a one year tenure.

There is general, though not unanimous, agreement about the desirability of having as Chairman a serving Head, or one who is at the point of retirement.

On ISC, much too is familiar:

HMC will wish ISC to be a more accountable body. It is important that the constituent Associations of ISC should be properly involved in the appointment of ISC posts and that the Officers and Committee Chairmen of ISC should be accountable to the Committee of ISC. ISC should be judged by its accountability and by its effectiveness in serving the interests of the members of HMC.

And on HMC itself, we find this comment:

There is a minority view, articulated by one Division and one or two individual members, that this (review) is an opportunity to introduce more radical changes which would give members an altogether more effective organisation and service.



Geoff Lucas focusing sharply in Liverpool.

But (and few will be surprised by this), the conclusion states:

The main consensus of the responses from members at all stages of the consultation is for keeping much of HMC as it is.

Whether or not we will end up with the same conclusion at the end of the Ten for 10/10 review remains to be seen. The most important thing is that, after ten years, we are indeed taking a long, hard look at ourselves.

Almost ten years ago, when I joined HMC as its Secretary, I gave a brief address, as a newcomer and as an outsider, on the theme of 'Outside looking in'. Some ten years on, and now very much an insider, the theme of 'Inside looking out' might be a more apt title. The current review of HMC is, in my view, not only timely, but essential if we are to face the challenges of the next decade. Whether you're reading this as an insider (a member, past or present) or as an outsider (perhaps from a school whose Head is a member, or

from another association with whom HMC has links), your views would be welcome. This, as they say, is your starter for ten!

Geoff Lucas is the Secretary of HMC.

HERE & THERE

If you have news of topical interest, however brief, for 'Here and There', please email it to Dr Stephen Coyne at head.kingsmac@rmpc.co.uk. Items should not exceed 150 words. Good colour photographs are also welcome.

Worth School begins 50th anniversary celebrations

Worth School in Turners Hill, near Crawley, Sussex, celebrates its 50th anniversary as a senior school this year. Monks arrived at Worth in 1933, sent from Downside Abbey in Somerset to set up Worth Priory and a prep school. Worth Priory was given independence and became Worth Abbey in 1957 and the prep school transformed into a senior school in 1959.

Various commemorative events are being held during 2009-10, the first of which took place in September when around 160 former staff joined current staff at the school for a reunion.

Head Master Gino Carminati addressed the assembled former colleagues and old friends, describing some of the developments Worth has undertaken in recent years as well as its plans for the future, including the school's move to full co-education.

In November, a very special Worth 50 Concert was held at Westminster Central Hall in London, involving musicians and singers from Benedictine schools around the UK, who joined under one roof



Five of Worth School's six Head Masters pictured at the staff reunion are, from the left, Dom Kevin Taggart (from 1977-1983), Dom Stephen Ortiger (1983-1993), Dom Christopher Jamison (1994-2002, current Abbot of Worth Abbey), Mr Peter Armstrong (2002-2007) and Mr Gino Carminati (2007 - present). The first Head Master of Worth School, Dom Dominic Gaisford (1959-1976), died in 1994.

for the first time to help Worth celebrate its anniversary. The concert featured performances from students from Ampleforth, St Benedict's Ealing, Downside, and Glenstal schools.

Jumping through the hoop

Damian Ettinger reflects on becoming an HMC member

Even the most dedicated teacher is unlikely to be grateful to be told they will face two major inspections in one year, and it was certainly bad timing that Cokethorpe's application for HMC membership coincided with our six-yearly ISI Inspection!

I write of Cokethorpe's application. Of course, in reality, it is the Head who applies and, if successful, it is the Head who is offered HMC membership. In fact, no Head of Cokethorpe had ever been a member, and it seems to be a relatively rare occurrence for someone to seek membership from scratch.

As one of those few Heads to have jumped through that hoop, I am more than happy to offer a few reflections on my experience of the process. Throughout, we received great support from Roger Peel, the Membership Secretary, and I would certainly want to take this opportunity to thank him for his invaluable advice and encouragement.

When such an application is made, the scrutiny falls both on the Head and on the school. This is clear from the thorough nature of the inspection which, over a period of some days, and at the hands of a number of current HMC Heads, looked into all aspects of the life of the Cokethorpe community.

It is also clear from the demanding criteria which need to be satisfied before an application can be considered. Given the importance we would all attach to a flourishing sixth form, it is no surprise, for example, that an aspiring school is asked to demonstrate that it can retain and attract senior pupils. It is also expected that, on average, those pupils will go on to achieve a minimum of 250 UMS points. The school needs to demonstrate

the strength of its financial foundations and the quality of its governance.

Given all that scrutiny, it is hardly surprising that questions about the value of membership to the whole school community were very much to the fore. Those questions were all the more to the point, given that Cokethorpe has for some years been a member of SHMIS, which is a very highly regarded body and one that I have always found welcoming and very supportive. It is an opinion I know I share with other HMC Heads who retain joint membership of both bodies. But the qualities of SHMIS highlight again the demanding question. If SHMIS is so good, what need is there to join the HMC? Even more challenging, could it not seem more than a touch disloyal, even insulting, to valued colleagues?

So what arguments does a Head put forward to support this aspiration? Perhaps it is best to dispose of the economic argument first, not because it is the most important, but many will judge it to be the most honest. Even if, as a rule, independent school Heads are unlikely to judge a school by its affiliations, there is no escaping the fact that many parents do, and to be quite honest, so do some prep school Heads. At the very least they view the HMC as *'primus inter pares'*.

There is also a perceived social cachet. HMC schools can boast a host of distinguished *alumni* and, for many, there is a certain distinction in following their teenage footsteps. The most frequently proffered reason is that the HMC is associated with high academic standards and parents trust that schools in membership of HMC will provide the best possible teaching



HMC is associated with high academic standards.

and will guide their children to the limits of their potential. In short, membership of HMC is attractive to potential parents.

Nevertheless, the HMC was founded not merely to act as a 'kite mark', either academic or social, but to provide professional support for Heads, and that continues to be its main attraction to aspiring members. Cokethorpe has a good deal in common with many other HMC schools, and the opportunity to share ideas and to learn from the experience of fellow Heads is irresistible.

The annual conference brings Heads into direct contact with some of the prime movers in the formation of educational policy and most Heads would welcome the opportunity to influence educational thinking, as a member of the most famous and influential of all independent school associations.

Just as important is the infrastructure of local HMC groups, offering the same quality of support for deputies and pastoral staff, for directors of studies and heads of department. HMC offers an unrivalled network of mutual support and it is from that network that I expect Cokethorpe will derive the greatest benefit over the coming years.

As the recession bites and competition becomes fiercer, it could be said that only a foolish Head would spurn these manifold and manifest benefits. But it obviously can't be quite as simple as that. I said earlier that Cokethorpe has a good deal in common

with many other HMC schools, and that is certainly true.

But there are also schools that seem barely within touching distance – schools with facilities that dazzle the eyes; schools almost as famous on five continents as Manchester United (whose former Chairman, Martin Edwards, is an old boy of this school). The reality is that some organisations with that kind of disparity choose to adopt the *Animal Farm* view of equality. So it will be interesting to see how the HMC avoids that trap, to allow all an effective voice, to ensure that it can speak with a single voice or at least unite around a common vision, to ensure that schools can remain in competition and cooperation all at the same time!

Cokethorpe is extremely lucky to occupy a beautiful site in West Oxfordshire; it is a strong community of teachers, students and parents; and it is certainly moving forward with confidence and success. But it is not a world famous institution and, as in most HMC schools, its facilities need constant investment. But then, I suspect, it is exactly in respect of schools such as Cokethorpe that the strength and experience of HMC can be most effective.

Damian Ettinger was appointed Headmaster of Cokethorpe School in 2002.

In the face of an uncertain future

Mick Brookes calls for mutual respect and understanding

In her pre-conference address to delegates from the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS), Libby Purvis says:

Your responsibility is great, and not only to your own pupils. They will go out into the world and be a new generation to run that world; the best way they can do that is from a foundation of a happy, balanced, spiritually rich childhood.

Libby Purves 2006

In this mission statement, Libby touches on three important truths. There is universality about the role of the Head, whatever the setting and location. In my role as roving ambassador for the NAHT, both in the guise of National President (2000/2001) and now as General Secretary (2005 to present), I have been privileged to visit schools as varied as early years settings to post 16 and in various countries across the globe.

The most poignant of these was a primary 'school' in the Langar Township in South Africa. A room full of bright and eager children with the gleam of hope in their eyes; a gleam lost in the surly faces of the disaffected older youth.

The basics are: good order; authoritative leadership both in the classroom and in the school; and a curriculum that is engaging. The environment is important: a basic shelter for a school is clearly not as desirable as a state-of-the-art academy or a learning-steeped establishment surrounded by manicured playing fields. But it is the people that make the difference.

In a debate about class sizes, Rhodes Boyson (Conservative Education Minister when education was an explicit part of the Department) said "a good teacher could teach 40 children in a bus shelter". Whilst I disagree with his intention (to keep class

sizes high in the state sector), his recognition that the quality of teaching is paramount is correct. Other universal truths are:

- i) Children will misbehave if you let them, especially when they are in groups;
- ii) parents are swift to chide and slow to bless;
- iii) the law of unintended consequences operates in every setting;
- iv) your greatest asset and greatest challenge will be the leadership of your staff team.

Libby also touched on the baggage that children bring with them from home that may be stress, or lack of time and affection. The relationships that underpin the importance of childhood interaction are explored in *The Next Generation*, a powerful piece of research conducted by the Centre for Social Justice:

In the context of everyday medical practice, we came to recognise that the earliest years of infancy and childhood are not lost but, like a child's footprints in wet cement, are often life-long.¹

It is often in adolescence, a tricky time anyway, I vaguely remember, that these early imprints return to haunt. There are no usual suspects here. 'Key stress response systems and foundational systems for emotional regulation, kindness, empathy and concern, are very immature at birth. How they will unfold is dramatically affected by the infant's relational experiences.'

A school's collective abilities to mend and straighten damaged perceptions of the world are crucial and depend not just on the learnedness of your staff, but also their ability to guide and sup-



Mick Brookes.

port without seeming to be too distant or too close to the child in need.

Your colleagues' ability to respond to these needs will vary, sometimes because of their own indelible early childhood imprint, and the quality of that response is particularly important for boarders for whom surrogacy is, and may always have been, part of their perception of the world.

Without sufficient calming, soothing and emotion regulating interactions from parents and other significant adults, the stress response systems in the

infant brain, which are extremely sensitive to adverse postnatal experience, can become hypersensitive.

An infant can grow up unable to handle stress well and adopt a generally long-term defensive reaction to people and events. He or she can be persistently on the look out for threat, prone to anxiety, depression and anger, both in childhood and later life... In short, children's brains adapt to the environment they live in.

Having a secure childhood is not a prerogative of the wealthy. The loving homes of parents without a penny to rub together are as valuable as settings in any socio-economic circumstance. It is important to recognise that the rose-tinted view of the private sector is as dishonest as those perceptions of a lawless and failing state sector: you've got your problems and I've got mine!

The third message is about the children in our care who are the messengers and ambassadors to a future that some of us will not see. Whilst it is vital that schools and families work together to produce well-rounded and balanced individuals, their mission

must be defined, and with some urgency.

- If, as Jonathon Porritt, renowned eco-warrior, has warned on global warming, 'any vestige of business as usual in our schools will see us all fall into the abyss', how are we responding in our schools?
- If 5% of the population in China (and 7% in India) with the highest IQs is greater than the total population of the UK, what are we doing to equip today's youngsters for tomorrow's challenges?
- If the most in-demand jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004, what are we doing to prepare students for jobs that don't yet exist and that we cannot imagine?
- If 98% of 12 year-olds want to do well at school, but only 38% look forward to going to school, how should we respond to improving a child's academic experience?
- How should our young people respond to a world in which genocidal terrorism has become a favoured weapon of war – the antithesis of a 'spiritually rich childhood'?

These are, I believe, key questions for a curriculum that is going to equip future generations with the capacity to survive and thrive in a future that is as uncertain now as at any time in our evolutionary history.

You may have heard that some politicians think that children should be required to know important historical dates. Whilst I would agree that young people should have an understanding of historical chronology, in the great scheme of things how does the importance of this compare to the challenges described above?

I believe these are key questions for shaping the future of our schools wherever they are, and that future should be one which is shared between professionals working in the state and private sectors in a context of mutual respect and understanding.

Mick Brookes is the General Secretary of NAHT.

References

¹ Fellitti V, Anda R F (2008) The Hidden Epidemic.



HERE & THERE

Ardingly College is buzzing!

Ardingly College is one of the first schools in the UK to have taken up bee keeping. Pupils and staff are so concerned about the decline in the honey-bee population that they have set up their own bee keeping club, hoping eventually to harvest their own honey.

The first three boxes of bees have been placed in a secluded section of the school's 350 acre grounds in a field planted with honey-bee friendly meadow flowers and trees.

The students' first task has been to hive the bees, which involves checking the new colonies, making sure that a queen is present and then moving them into their new, permanent homes. The club has been inspecting the hives for several weeks now and so far the bees have settled in very well and seem to enjoy their new habitat with all colonies expanding well.

Making the most of a management review



Green space, mature trees and shady gardens: a place for scholarship and learning.

Adam Pettitt, Head Master of Highgate since 2006, describes a productive process and a profitable partnership

When the chairman, a recently retired career civil servant, proposed a review of Highgate's senior management structure and arrangements, I knew that it would be thorough, instructive and, like cod liver oil, ultimately good for me and for Highgate. The prescription was clear:

The purpose of this project is to review the School's senior management structure and arrangements, with a view to providing the Head Master and the governors with a rigorous analysis of present arrangements and considered opinions on their strengths, weaknesses and general fitness for purpose going forward.

A reassuring coda was added:

The School is in a strong position at the present time, financially and academically (in the widest sense), with a highly-skilled teaching and ancillary workforce, and strong demand for its product at all entry points. Our judgement is that, for these very reasons, it is now opportune to take stock, having regard to a range of potential risks, challenges

and opportunities in the next period, both seen and (as yet) unseen.

When the chairman suggested such a review, I had been in post for just over two years. My principal deputy had started with me; the bursar was retiring in six months' time; the Principal of the Pre-Preparatory School had just completed her first year in post and only one member of the senior team, which I had expanded from three deputies to a team of three (different) deputies and six assistant heads, pre-dated my appointment.

Over three years, Highgate had shifted from being a 13-18 boys' school to an 11-18 coeducational one. The external pressures facing all schools were changing: public benefit assessment; compliance with regulations and inspection; safe recruitment procedures and the need for a broader human resources function; a need to raise non-fee income and, not exclusive to but particularly true of Highgate, a continuing large volume of building works, restorations and potential new build.

My team and I were thus pretty receptive to the proposal: we

Management

knew things were going well, but we were all conscious that our planning for emergencies – avian or swine ‘flu, for example – to say nothing of risks on the horizon which turbulence in the City promised, was snatched from days bogged down in operational imperatives. We were not finding enough quality time for strategy, but we were impatient to get on and plan for the future. We were not finding enough time to articulate our vision for the school, but we knew that we had a compelling message to communicate.

My first conversation with Peter Cleasby was a reassuring one: he was keen to do his homework before he started on this project. With help from HMC colleagues, he did research in three other schools by way of background: a coeducational boarding school, a coeducational day school with its own junior school and a boys’ day school with plans for a coeducational sixth form; he was keen to understand our setting and context.

It became clear that Peter had honed the civil servant’s ability to digest inordinate amounts of information and synthesise it rapidly; he was even willing to eschew management jargon to ensure that his recommendations were cast in language which teachers – even linguists – would not balk at. At the end of a week of interviews with colleagues, Peter identified a truth which we had always known but rarely articulated:

Teachers do not find it easy to delegate responsibility. It is not a profession that encourages it; indeed, the concept of the teacher in the classroom having sole responsibility for what goes on there once the door has closed means that developing the skill of delegation has no significant place in the early years of a teaching career. And, particularly in the independent sector where a school’s reputation is one of its most precious assets, a high degree of trust and confidence in colleagues is inevitable if responsibility is to be passed down the management line. This is not peculiar to Highgate.

These and other insights into school management generally, and management at Highgate particularly, permeated a sensitive and supportive report. Peter was occasionally surprised and, I suspect, baffled, by some of our practices (a kind of institutionalised living on borrowed time when it came to the incursions of regulatory compliance, for example), but with the patient wisdom of a kindly and non-judgmental financial adviser (a secular confessor?), made a series of sensible, practical recommendations, each of which had ‘an intended overall result’.

He also saw the pressures which school managers put themselves under and the achievements of schools in the independent sector like ours; he treated strengths with as much detail as weaknesses.

His findings fell into three clearly delineated sections, with succinct but necessarily detailed and easily grasped recommendations. My response on first reading his report was twofold: first, one of recognition: it was the school I knew – the picture of long hours, overlaid email inboxes and in trays and a desire to find time to concentrate on the strategic without harming the operational was pretty accurate; secondly, a sigh of relief – a consultant’s report which made sense, was supportive and gave a series of easily achieved, easily grasped recommendations.

I report to governors on progress on Peter’s recommendations at the end of each term, but his report has primed my and the senior team’s approach to the drafting of our school

development plan and been a useful tool for the bursar as he embarks on his first career in a school.

There are doubtless other good routes for schools to evaluate and strengthen their management capacity, but particularly if change is afoot, I would recommend a few hours of a good consultant’s time.

That good consultant, Peter Cleasby, adds his perspective:

The received wisdom is that it’s good for most of us to explore beyond our comfort zones. Having experienced schools only as a pupil (a long time ago), as a parent (a rather one-sided perspective) and as a governor in the state sector (briefly), a review of Highgate’s senior management arrangements was certainly uncharted territory. Indeed, the prospect of being challenged to come up with practical advice fit for a distinctive, self-confident and unfamiliar professional environment was daunting.

Yet, at the same time, it was clear that Highgate were challenging themselves by opening their doors to someone from a different background, without educational preconceptions but quite possibly with some undefined baggage of his own. Could someone whose working life had been spent largely in the civil service, even with acquired consultancy skills, really add value to what the senior team were already doing? That, too, was a move beyond the comfort zone, this time on Highgate’s part.

The value that a review of this sort should bring is one of gentle, informed and constructive challenge based on the premise that there are different ways of looking at things that have had a beneficial impact elsewhere. Principles and practices from the worlds of business and government will not necessarily be suited to the world of independent schools; but some of them may be, adapted sensibly.

Only the school itself can decide what is likely to work, but the reviewer can help the Head and the senior team identify where there is grit in the machine and what are the options to think about. Even where a problem is already known within the school, it can be helpful to have it described by someone from outside.

As Adam Pettitt’s comments show, we did manage to come up with a useful basis for moving forward on some of the issues facing Highgate. I stress ‘we’ because it was a collaborative exercise. Having made it clear to everyone I spoke to – staff, governors and those outside the school who participated – that the review was not an audit, an inspection or a performance review, I found that people were candid and forthcoming in what they said to me. These conversations lay at the core of the review and were often a stimulating source of ideas about what would work and what would not.

Reviews like this are not designed for failing schools. They add value because they build on strengths and successes that are already there. For me, it was a privilege to be able to contribute, however modestly, to the development of Highgate. It was also an immensely enjoyable educational experience.

Peter Cleasby, formerly a senior civil servant in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, is now a director of Quantera, which he describes as a small consultancy.



Riskier recruiting

Chris Ramsey argues that the obsession with bureaucratic checks engenders a general distrust of adult helpers

comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6797723.ece).

It is that the obsession with bureaucratic checks before an adult is allowed to work with children engenders a general distrust of adult helpers, a kind of repulsing of the social instinct to help. This works in two ways, according to Furedi: first, the adults who would like to give of their time – and would enjoy and be enriched by voluntary work with children – are made by the cumbersome and invasive CRB check to feel as if this is somehow wrong, a suspect activity: so, they hesitate and their numbers dwindle. Secondly, parents and others in authority are made to feel that there is something to suspect in voluntary adult help and even children come subconsciously to mistrust and reject it.

I was unsure of all this until I went on a (privately-run) Child Protection course two years ago. It was an unhappy experience, run emotionally by a course leader who admitted during the afternoon that her children had been the subject of abuse, thus catching me and other cynics in a nice trap. How could we not sympathise with her? But how could we agree with her hysteria either, for hysteria it was.

In one session we were given a series of behaviour patterns demonstrated by applicants for a job. Which ones would encourage us to appoint an applicant, and which lead to ‘safe’ and therefore obvious rejection? ‘Readily volunteers to help with pupils out of school activities’ was one. ‘Seems to enjoy the company of teenagers’ another. ‘Is ambitious only to give time to the school and has few non-school interests’ a third.

Well, a candidate behaving like this sounded pretty ideal to me (and to my course partner) but of course we were wrong. These behaviours should have ruled the person right out of contention. Guarded, stand-offish clock-watchers were what we were supposed to go for. I am sure that some potential child abusers do indeed display these characteristics; I’m equally sure some don’t (or are clever enough not to at interview). Equally, many fine teachers display these characteristics, and I would rather they did not hide them to ensure appointment.

Now of course things are about to be different. The new Independent Safeguarding Authority will allow for one check to cover all of an applicant’s activities, so that the particular nonsense whereby each separate activity has to lead to a check has been ironed out. But the ISA check will have to apply to all kinds of adult volunteers who would previously not have had to be checked – including, most notoriously, host families in foreign exchanges.

This is a new and mind-boggling lunacy quite without logic. Have the families or caring governments of Francois or Kurt or Manuel demanded that the Smiths of Chester or the Browns of Oxford be checked, the better to ensure their children’s safety? No. Partner schools in mainland Europe are mystified by the proposal.

“Can you do a reference for me?” This question to a Head on the penultimate day of the summer term was always likely to produce an inner if not an outright groan. When asked by a clever and popular young physicist, its effect was significantly increased, so it was only with a real effort that I managed a smile and a benign “of course”.

In fact, happily, the colleague in question simply wanted to help for a couple of days in his local Church youth group, and the request was for his enhanced CRB clearance. The frustration he evidently felt at having to go through all this again was easy to empathise with. As it happens I too had helped the previous year in a local group (long summer holidays, do your bit, *etc*) and I too had had to be CRB-cleared for it, despite the fact that both of us are CRB-d to the hilt through school.

Quite what this second check is supposed to throw up that the first missed was beyond us both. Still, I suppose, why not, if it makes children safer, part of me sighs: the inconvenience is relatively minor after all. Well, for a start because it costs: in both these cases the school had paid for an enhanced check before we could be employed (in both cases within the last 18 months) and the Church now paid again for an identical check. I suppose if my colleague or I had also wanted to volunteer for a local sports club that would have required a third check. Or a whim to help with the scouts might have meant a fourth. The mind wanders: do lollipop ladies get checked? Referees of youth games? Or what about policemen themselves if they go into schools? The money (it currently costs in excess of £60 per check) goes into the tills of a private company, and don’t forget that unless you do a lot of these checks you have to go through an agency which takes its cut. The words of the classic hack journalist’s phrase, ‘licence’, ‘print’ and ‘money’, come to mind.

A second reason to jib at all this was articulated by Frank Furedi last year in a typically forthright article (www.frankfuredi.com/index.php/site/article/218/), restated by Jenni Russell in the *Sunday Times* (timesonline.co.uk/tol/



‘...parents and others in authority are made to feel that there is something to suspect in voluntary adult help and even children come subconsciously to mistrust and reject it.’

By what right, then, does the DCSF think to insist that these English families are checked? It smacks of extraordinary imperialist fervour (those French might not realise it but Francois needs protecting) and, in any case, the English child will be staying in a scandalously unchecked household in Paris or Berlin, so what is the point (unless a stay in unchecked foreign households will be made illegal)?

And will every adult in the host family be subject to checking? The DCSF says yes, so is Uncle Fred precluded from coming to supper, Grandpa not to come and discuss the Normandy beaches? Current orthodoxy of course is to smile grimly and say that if one case of child abuse is prevented by these measures, then the bureaucracy and inconvenience are worthwhile.

Well, first, it won't be (the tragic case of Victoria Climbié is often cited as the catalyst for child protection legislation: she was not, sadly, even ever at school. Almost all cases of child abuse are found to be perpetrated by relatives, not volunteer helpers or teachers).

Second, the harm done is more than to the pockets of schools who would like to spend money on pupils, not bureaucracy. Safer recruitment obsession has engendered fear in society, as Frank Furedi outlines, and it has moreover made us complacent. We are, we believe, all safe now, because everyone has been checked.

But most of all, it has made schools dangerously risk-averse. ‘Safe’ recruiting good, ‘risky’ recruiting bad, is the attitude. It is right enough that we should have to state ‘we are committed to the safety of children’ on our adverts, but I believe safety, like happiness, to be a by-product of good education, not a premise for it. I am, sometimes, for risky recruiting. A well-known Head had a reputation for appointing people he liked when he met them on the train (and it was substantially true); I would not perhaps go that far. But some of the best appointments I have made have been risky ones: unconventional, sparky ones who do not give textbook answers but make me think, with whom I want to talk more.

I had a choice recently between two mathematicians. One was experienced, textbook ‘safe’. A second wobbled over the child protection question the other had dealt with crisply – he was not sure what he would do in the situations outlined, he would need advice, he might get things wrong, but he'd try his best. Then I asked him why he liked maths, and he described vividly and unforgettably an argument with a friend in which the rival claims of university courses were tested out.

And where did he have this conversation? “In the pub”, he blushed. I looked at my deputy. There was no question: this was the man for us.

Chris Ramsey is the Head Master of King's School, Chester.

Education, education, education?

What a let down: just more regulation, regulation, regulation, says Bernard Trafford

We all remember Tony Blair's 1997 election mantra: education, education, education. I recall the sense of excitement that a new government might really take education to its heart – notwithstanding the palpable threat to the Assisted Places Scheme which was subsequently sacrificed on the altar of appeasing the new regime's left wing. Schools and teachers are unlikely to feel so strongly wooed this time around. The last decade of politics has rendered us more cynical and less eager to believe simply because we've been let down so badly and so often.

Education was indeed central to the New Labour agenda. Where it all went wrong was in the lack of imagination with which they applied that new focus. Given the undoubted additional funding, did it unlock in the maintained sector a tide of creativity, innovation and excitement? A new belief in what children could achieve and in what teachers and schools could do for and with them?

Did it hell! It gave rise to a flood of government legislation, interference and micromanagement unparalleled in the history of UK education. Time and again ASCL General Secretary John Dunford has given the statistics of the extraordinary stream of initiatives and requirements that hit the maintained schools day after day.

This is the government that set up not one but two new working groups to deal with duplication. One of them, WAMG, also got the job of monitoring the amount of paper thrown at schools. The bureaucrats got round that one, though: they started sending it all by email instead.

I used to come away from ASCL council meetings feeling guilty. The guilt stemmed from my sense of relief that, having spent a couple of days hearing about the latest government lunacies that they were dealing with, I could go back to my independent school knowing that I could ignore most of them.

How things change! By the time you read this, my school will probably have been inspected under the new framework. To be honest, it will be a relief to have got to that point, to have some human beings poking around and trying to find out whether the school really does what it says on the tin. That is what inspection is for.

But the lead up to it has been nightmarish. My previous school was inspected in 2007 under the second cycle. All the paperwork was in order: at the time we were entirely compliant with the 12 pages of regulatory requirements.

It will come as no surprise to colleagues if I confess to having 'borrowed' a few of those policies for my new school: plagiarism, outlawed from the classroom, is alive and well in policy-writing circles! I could have saved myself the trouble. The material I was so pleased with two-and-a-half years ago has become spectacularly out of date. With over 100 regulatory standards now to meet, most policies required a total rewrite.

As for writing a new anti-bullying policy, don't get me started! The regulations call for a policy 'which is short, succinct, and written in language everyone understands'. That described our previous policy perfectly. It was down-to-earth, written in very

plain language and in the second person, aimed directly at students. It didn't mince words. It was a useful and helpful working document, defining bullying as anything that made someone else feel hurt or humiliated.

New regulations require us ungrammatically but specifically to list all the forms of bullying 'including racial, religious, cultural, sexual/sexist, homophobic, disability, and cyber'. And we have to include details of how members of staff record instances of bullying; how they are trained; even how we raise collective awareness of where and when bullying is likely to occur.

Our policy is now in the third person. It's less personal and direct. It's half as long again as it was and will be less effective. But it meets the standard.

In the eyes of policymakers, education has become regulation and regulation has become education. Like the animals observing the pigs and humans at the end of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, we can't tell the difference any more. Currently we await the roll-out (*sic*) of the Independent Safeguarding Authority, an additional paper chase whose complexity will make all previous rules a stroll in the park by comparison.

Its inventors have fallen into the fundamental error of policy-wonks. Regulation doesn't make things better for children. It just means that organisations get better at ticking boxes to keep

Bernard Trafford and time wait for no man.



Management

government off their backs. What begins to count is not what you do: it's getting the paperwork right. It's all about compliance: and, my, how compliant we have become!

I've said it before. If the next government is Conservative (a betting certainty right now) we have to keep banging the table, insisting that Michael Gove and his colleagues slash back the sprawling bureaucracy as they have promised to. Why don't I trust them to do it? Because recent history teaches us that they won't, however much they want to. Their advisers and bureaucrats have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and will tell them they can't impose change. And then we'll simply get the incoming administration's shiny new edifice built straight on top of the crumbling remnants of the old regime.

John Dunford issued a demand to government a year ago:

"One in, one out." No new initiatives without the same number of old ones being removed.

We should insist that the new government goes further. This crazy over-regulation must go. Our schools are independent and must be allowed to be independent. We should be judged on what we do and what our pupils achieve, not on our ability to manipulate the required wording on pieces of paper which, for all that we make them 'available' to parents as required, are seldom read.

Why would parents spare them more than a passing glance? They know, as we do, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating – not in the ingredients or health warnings printed on the packet.

Bernard Trafford is Headmaster of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Vice-Chairman of HMC.

HERE & THERE

If you have news of topical interest, however brief, for 'Here and There', please email it to Dr Stephen Coyne at head.kingsmac@rmpc.co.uk. Items should not exceed 150 words. Good colour photographs are also welcome.



Mummy returns to Stonyhurst

An Egyptian mummy, discovered by a Jesuit missionary and archaeologist in 1850, has returned to Stonyhurst College. Since the 1970s the remains of the unidentified boy, aged five or six, have been cared for at Manchester Museum.

It has been part of the museum's world-famous collection of Egyptian artefacts and over the last 30 years a series of forensic science investigations, including scans and x-rays, have been carried out to learn more about the boy's health and living conditions.

Now Stonyhurst College has the necessary facilities in place to conserve the mummy, so it has recently been returned to its former home. The mummy has created a lot of interest amongst the pupils and will now be part of a display in the Long Room, which is dedicated to the study of science, the natural world and human anthropology.



Farewell Sandy

Miles Petheter looks back over the long – very long – career of a reluctant leaver

Nobody living can imagine Rutherford College without Alistair McIntyre, ‘Sandy’ to his friends and, less respectfully behind his broad back, to his pupils. Sandy has begun to admit to himself that he cannot imagine life without Rutherford. “Thank goodness this ghastly Labour government made one sensible decision and pushed the age of retirement on to 65. I’ve still got plenty of years teaching left in me,” he would sympathetically explain to exhausted younger colleagues. The Headmaster was much less pleased with the legislation, as he had hoped to host a farewell party for Sandy soon after his 60th birthday.

Sandy became a Rutherfordian in 1958 and has been there ever since, apart from three years away at Oxford reading history at Porterhouse. His contemporaries at school remember him for being tall and, in those days before the ravages of too many cooked breakfasts, thin, but he doesn’t stand out in photographs of the teams of his generation, photographs which, as school archivist, Sandy now lovingly catalogues.

However, somehow he seems to know an awful lot about who scored the winning try against Selhurst or a century against Harwell and he is always ready with telling, personal detail: “He scored twice despite having terrible athlete’s foot.” Some old boys have muttered darkly about Sandy “doctoring the record”, but as a historian Sandy always feels on safe ground – “This is ‘my period’ and I control the primary source. Knowledge is power!”

At Oxford he lacked the angst to be a bearded, duffel coated, ban-the-bomb activist and was too early for flower power, but, in his General Studies lessons, he always claimed to be “a child of the Sixties”, with a conspiratorial wink, not that anyone has ever seen him in a flowery shirt, let alone with a flower in his hair. And as for sunbathing naked on the college lawn, even matron would blanch at the sight. In truth, as a student he was the last of the earnest, conformist young men, much preferring Shirley Bassey to the Rolling Stones.

Too much exercise in the form of pulling on an oar, pulling pints and climbing over college walls scraped him a Third. It was with some relief that he accepted an invitation from Arnold Thomas, Headmaster of legendary stature in the annals of Rutherford, (mainly for his low golf handicap), to return to his old school “for a spot of teaching until you finalise your decisions about life”. Sandy threw his application forms for the Army and the Church in the bin with no regrets.

Sandy hadn’t meant to remain at Rutherford but “I found I had a bent for teaching. It’s remarkable what you can achieve with a dramatic flourish of the academic gown and the accurate trajectory of a piece of chalk. Nobody goes to sleep at the back of my lessons!” Sandy never studied for a teaching qualification – “I never felt I needed one; all that theory wouldn’t have been of any benefit to me!” Generations of his pupils silently agreed.

He took over as Head of Department almost by default a few years later, when the previous incumbent departed for the Continent mid-term with the French *assistante*. “The Head wanted someone up to date to lead the department,” Sandy explains modestly, but in practice the Head used it as an excuse to keep him out of the running as a housemaster.



Master without Portfolio.

For years Sandy had remained an expectant resident tutor in Rackemann house – “Gave the house a bit of continuity and culture” – but the advent of inspection regimes in the early ’90s meant that a bachelor tutor was too much of a liability. “I wasn’t hanging around to be asked by some filly from social services with sandals and a clipboard whether the boys knew how to telephone home or whether the lavatory flushed.” Since then he has occupied a small house in the school grounds, without pastoral responsibility. “Master without portfolio” is how he wistfully describes himself to visiting old boys.

He never married. “Ruther has been my wife and mother,” he quips, “although I did cause a twinkle in the eye of one or two matrons in my early days.” Indeed, substantiated rumours of a romance with a naive young matron reached even the ears of senior staff at the time, but she found God instead and moved to Redditch. Nowadays, looking at his colleagues’ children and his bank balance, he is rather grateful that he escaped unscathed.

In reality, his aged mother lives in Virginia Water and this is where he spends much of the holidays unless on ‘research trips’ to Germany – he has a fascination with Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Nobody is quite sure what he does on these trips for he is uncontactable, but he always returns with his aged Rover groaning with cases of hock. “My only vice is a large G&T after teaching”, which helps him overlook the larger malt to soothe the troubled breast during marking.

Whilst Rutherford was still “what it had been for centuries”, he ran a wine club for sixth form boys, The Jilly Goolden Society, but the school’s short serving and first Headmistress shut it down as “not being in tune with the school’s moral and social aims”. “Teetotalism by the back door” rumbled Sandy as he took away the empties for the last time. “Didn’t work in the US, won’t work at Rutherford.”



The Headmistress made Sandy feel uneasy.

Sandy regularly changes the display of memorabilia in the Old Boys' room, now renamed, much against his wishes, the Old Rutherfordians' centre, to reflect the recent change to co-ed. Sandy's views on coeducation were described as "not politically correct" by a young female governor.

"That's why I've studied and taught history, not politics," he sometimes explains to his droopy-eyed sixth form. "Nobody achieved anything in history by being politically correct!" He is a living testament to his aphorism. Although he would never admit it, he rather appreciates the positive influence of girls in his sixth-form sets.

High point of his recent Rutherford life was the celebration at the millennium of 100 terms of teaching, with a champagne reception put on by his colleagues, attended by some old boys, and even a governor, no less, which made up for the Headmistress's absence.

Asked by a young sprog on the staff what he is going to do with all his time during his impending retirement and where he will live, Sandy retorts angrily "Haven't the foggiest." The common room are investigating the possibility of a winter cruise to the Baltic for a leaving present.

Miles Petheter got out while he was still ahead.

HERE & THERE

If you have news of topical interest, however brief, for 'Here and There', please email it to Dr Stephen Coyne at head.kingsmac@rmpc.co.uk. Items should not exceed 150 words. Good colour photographs are also welcome.

Caimbo from Shiplake College

Caimbo's first ever gig was in the courtyard of Shiplake College's Burr House, playing for a free toastie in the summer of 2003. Leonardo Roberts, Piers Mortimer, Ali Sloane, and Dave Cullen took their name from their home town, Cambridge. All made their mark at school – all four were powerful sportsmen in different ways, with Leo playing first team sport in rugby, hockey and cricket with great style and aggression.

Piers' guitar solo at the start of a Family Service in the Parish Church bemused some of the grandparents, and Dave's drumming threatened to bring down the roof of the sports hall in more than one House Music Competition.

Caimbo's reputation is growing, as is the list of venues they play. Their debut album, *Electric Dreams*, was recorded in LA.

*Top Row: Leo Roberts, Piers Mortimer.
Bottom Row: Ali Sloane, Dave Cullen.*



Forty days and forty nights

Ian Power finds that the dream is still alive

Early August and they will start again soon, I just know it. It's always the same. I am standing in front of the class, the lesson is going well and then it happens. The boy at the back shouts something out, I stop mid-sentence, tell him to be quiet but he pays no attention, he keeps on talking, I raise my voice, he still carries on talking, more people join in, the noise is deafening, I am shouting, shouting louder but it's no good, I run out of the room and then I am awake. It's only a dream.

I know that there has to be a mistake. A few minutes past midnight on the Tuesday before the A level results are published and it cannot be true. 15% A and B grades and where did all those Us come from? My director of studies is just too relaxed. What is he saying? They weren't really the best year, we did warn the parents, it won't be that bad, it can't be that bad. Oh, and remember the fifth form is a really good year, they won't let you down, the GCSE results will be fine. Fine! I'm not worried about the b****y GCSE results, it's what the chairman is going to say when he sees all those Us!

League tables, remember those? The ones we don't believe in until the chairman sees us near the bottom, below that second-rate place down the road that always lies about its results anyway! And then the chairman is beside me. What is he doing at midnight in the director of studies' office, how did he find out so soon?

Would I mind accompanying him into the boardroom for an extraordinary meeting of the board? Of course I would! And then I run for the door and I am awake and it's just another dream, another year, waiting in fear and trepidation for the results to appear across the ether. The same dream that comes in its many forms even when we should get the best results ever.

This year things were different. Yes, the teaching dream still arrived on cue, but this time it was not quite so intense, almost as if my subconscious knew that, come September, I would not be entering a classroom, not attempting to bring to order an unruly class or admonish a miscreant teenager. Something deep inside knew that my darkest fears were concentrated elsewhere. As for the results nightmare and the all-seeing, omnipotent chairman, well it just didn't happen.

In fact this August was 'results-free' on the dream front. Yes, after 12 years the spell was broken, the chairman was no longer the lead actor on the set of the latest film in the *Twilight* series and that annoying interest in league tables, which we all try to deny, was indeed a distant memory.

There were dreams of course, not about results, but dreams all the same. This August the dreams were focused on shoes, very large shoes. A little like the teenage Harry Potter peering through the eyes of Nagini the snake, I was there looking at a rather dishevelled version of myself, standing in a pair of shoes that were clearly far too big for me.

And there are questions, too many questions, questions that I cannot answer and the sense of helplessness increases and I am shouting again, just like the teacher dream, and then I am awake. As I lie there trying to remember the dream, there is just enough familiarity to make me realise that the shoes are the Membership



A problem shared is a problem halved.

Secretary's shoes and the inquisitors are my colleagues: a hundred questions, none of which I seem to be able to answer.

Move forward 40 days or so and here I am sitting in Roger's chair behind Roger's desk, two weeks into the new job. So what is different? How do two weeks as Membership Secretary compare with 12 years as a Head? For one thing the dreams have changed. I now dream about the Conference in Liverpool, ISI inspections and my beloved Tigers being relegated from the Guinness Premiership, not having scored a single try all season!

It was strange not preparing beginning of year meetings, INSET and assemblies; not worrying about how many pupils would actually turn up on the first day; and not taking bets with the deputy head on who would be the first head of department to beat a path to my door, or simply repeat the oft-quoted refrain (in broad Derby accent): "It'll be a disaster, Headmaster." All that has gone, as has the huge set of jailer's keys that every Head seems to have! So what is there in its place?

Perhaps, not surprisingly, there are still some of the same problems, but this time they belong to my colleagues in HMC and I have realised that the most important part of my new role is to try to help solve them. Some are familiar, others are new, but in working closely with the membership there is a sense (excuse the cliché) that a problem shared is indeed a problem halved and that, at the end of the day, it will be sorted out, leaving them to get back to the most enjoyable and important part of their job, the children; sharing in their successes and unfailing enthusiasm. I have to admit that I miss that regular contact with the children already, but the sense of being of some value, of offering support and of using what experience I have to benefit others, are not too bad as compensations.

I have no doubt there will be moments when I wonder why I took it on but, so far, it has been great fun, something that I always tried to remember as a Head. Yes, there was even a funny side to the threat of imprisonment when the CCF frightened a barn owl from her nest during the biennial inspection! And before you ask, if convicted it *is* a £2,000 fine or 12 months in jail!

I always felt that being a Head was the best job in the world, and that might still be the case, but Membership Secretary of HMC, now there's a job to be reckoned with! What is more it has the bonus of stopping all those pre-term nightmares. Now that can't be bad, can it?

Ian Power is the Membership Secretary of HMC.

Keep marketing!

'choosing to send children to an independent school is a time-consuming process involving many complex considerations...'



Simon Brindle introduces the world of 21st century pupil recruitment

While the economy is showing tentative signs of recovery – albeit with the significant support of interest rates close to zero and transfusions of money through quantitative easing – it is likely that conditions for independent schools will continue to be challenging into 2010 and beyond, as parents make difficult choices over family budgets.

The fact that independent school enrolments have shown a year-on-year decline for the first time since 2005, coupled with an on-going stream of mergers and closures across the sector, all combine to present school managements with a challenging business environment as they plan ahead.

Given this context, the decision-making team in an independent school needs to possess a robust, cohesive and, above all, consistent strategy that actively engages with the parents of existing and prospective pupils within their catchment area.

While some management teams are making significant cuts to their communications budgets, many more have recognised that this is precisely the time to become more assertive. The reality is that schools must invest in communicating effectively with parents of children who represent the next generation of pupils. This is an obvious statement to make, but it's interesting how some schools don't stand by this commitment seriously enough when economic conditions worsen.

Schools should be proud of their achievements and how to motivate pupils and inspire parents to support them, but as the environment becomes more challenging, it's key that they

harness and communicate strong and positive messages – both to the parents of future pupils and to current parents. The key to success is to bring clarity to the process through which the communications strategy is created and the actions to implement it are agreed.

Sometimes an external agency may provide the catalyst to guide school decision-makers through a consultative process that maps out the school's proposition, reviews candidate communications techniques, profiles the school's catchment area and then agrees the tactics and tools that will be needed to bring the strategy to life.

The experience of Design Force might prove instructive. The company was established in 1998 as a design agency, creating new prospectuses for schools and, latterly, developing websites and it began to build a client portfolio of independent schools from 2001. As the consultancy side of the company's work began to build up, they recognised that the design work they were creating was much more likely to be cost-effective when it faithfully reflected how the school matched and met the needs and aspirations of parents in its catchment area.

Schools increasingly need to consider 'smart targeting' prospective parents, by location, lifestyle and aspiration. Good design work needs to project a school effectively, but it also has to work within the context of the media and messages that parents are consuming in other areas of their life.

A strong recruiting presentation should use the language, images and design techniques that work well in presenting the

school's offer in a way that makes sense to today's parents, without diluting the unique story of the school and its educational heritage.

A school's external affairs department must understand how best to have a dialogue with busy people. In addition, careful research of the catchment area makes it possible to profile locations and develop communications collateral that put the message in front of those parents who are more likely to consider independent education for their children.

More and more, independent schools are looking for advice on how to blend e-communications with traditional methods. Clearly, print and distribution costs form a significant element of a communications budget, so it's not surprising that schools are now evaluating whether to put the focus of their investment on e-communications. The best advice would be to maintain a balance, so that each technique complements the other.

For example, prospectuses are undoubtedly expensive, but a school still needs to commission copy, design and photography if they are to create a website, whilst the cost of site building and hosting must also be taken into account. A further issue is that choosing to send children to an

independent school is a time-consuming process involving many complex considerations and, even when the big philosophical and financial decision to go private has been taken, parents must take more time to pick the specific school that's right for each child and for their family.

Having a prospectus that they can return to and use as a source in their discussion is invaluable to this process. So an increasing number of schools are tackling this challenge by building shorter prospectuses that can be updated more often, alongside their website, and possibly a series of e-bulletins, to keep their messages fresh.

Looking ahead, independent schools must become increasingly agile with their marketing if they are to attract and retain the next generation of families. The lesson we have all learned over the last decade is that parents as consumers have become more sophisticated and demanding.

Their expectations continue to rise, so schools will inevitably have to up their game if they are to survive and thrive. More establishments will turn to external help with their communications, not only to equip them with professional expertise, but also to give them an objective perspective on how to tackle future priorities.

Heads and headlines

HMC TV News: producer Derek Dyson explains how Independent Television News and independent schools make the perfect partnership

One story that does the rounds at ITN is that of a survey to find Britain's most trusted person. The list of candidates included, among others, God, the Prime Minister and Trevor McDonald. It is said that the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being won out – although God came in a close second.

It is this trust which ITN's communications arm, ITN Consulting, has developed over the years that has been so important in the development of our relationship with HMC. Throwing your school gates open to a news crew may be a daunting prospect – but the end results have made for captivating viewing.

The biggest pleasure in making *HMC TV News* has been travelling countrywide – and overseas – to witness at first hand the diversity of our independent schools. We have had more than 50 schools on the programme in the past two years, from Llandoverly to London, Oundle to Ontario and Haileybury to The Hague.

Just about every school has provided a different experience, whether this be the striking architecture of Scotland's George Heriot's, the awe-inspiring band parade at Christ's Hospital, or the beauty of Magdalen College School set between the river and the dreaming spires of Oxford.

However this is the side of the story the public are already familiar with. I hope that through *HMC TV News* we are beginning to show that independent schools are amongst the most forward-thinking and open-minded in the country.

This year's programme will feature student-built racing cars at Churcher's, rock bands at University College School and a student-designed boarding house at St Bede's that resembles a five-star hotel in the Med.

The feedback I get from the crews is always very positive. The

beautiful locations and historical buildings juxtaposed with modern developments make for some compelling footage – and they are always complimentary about the wonderful school lunches.

But it is the students who are the real stars of the show. The attitude of these young people still amazes me. We have had concert pianists, international rugby players and students who have climbed mountains – literally. One became the first Welsh woman to climb Mount Everest.

There will actually be a student on the programme credits this year – another first for *HMC TV News*. The student will be fronting their school's film, which I think says it all about the open-mindedness and confidence of students in the independent sector. And for me it is a great opportunity to look out for the 'on-screen talent' of the future.

This is just one example of how we use our expertise to give schools something more than a promotional video. School Heads are often sceptical about how we are going to cram every aspect of school life into just three minutes. I hope they have been pleasantly surprised.

Renowned newsreader Martyn Lewis will once again be your anchor in the *HMC TV News* studio. He once caused great controversy by suggesting that the news should feature more 'good news' stories. It was all tongue-in-cheek but remains a pertinent point. We like to think that with *HMC TV News* at least we are going some way to achieving his vision.

HMC TV News was shown at the HMC Annual Conference at the Adelphi Britannia Hotel in Liverpool. The programme will also be streamed on www.hmc.org.uk and is included with this issue of Conference & Common Room.

Gadarene challenges on Common and Heath

Back in the early summer, media attention focused for a while on the way schools were handling the first wave of swine 'flu. Allyn's was one of the schools in the spotlight, so *Conference & Common Room* put some questions to Antony Faccinello, who was co-ordinating the school's management of the issues involved. Meanwhile, north of the river, Jenny Stephen was faced with a similar challenge in the GDST's South Hampstead High School

How did the school first become aware of the problem?

We reported a cluster of illness in one year-group to the Health Protection Agency's local unit and swiftly isolated further cases showing symptoms by sending them home. Swabbing was arranged by the Health Protection Agency and the result on the Bank Holiday of five confirmed cases led to the immediate closure of the school for one week.

Were there protocols in place to deal with such a problem?

We had the plan for dealing with avian flu and had learned lessons from dealing with the challenges of the July 7th terrorist attacks and recent snow-closure.

How well did they work?

Our communication with parents and staff was the crucial part. The website became the main conduit for passing essential information and publishing regular updates, which became twice daily for the duration of the closure and then into the following week.

On the bank holiday Monday, we registered in excess of 60,000 hits on the school website. Cascading phone calls worked in getting key staff in. Beyond that, spreading the word amongst the pupils that they need to read the website update is best achieved by their own internet-based social networks.

What were the most difficult challenges to deal with?

It was a major incident by any measure and the circumstances were unique and unpredictable.

Getting every parent to attend a medical consultation prior to distribution of the antiviral some five hours from first hearing of the confirmed cases turned out to be a logistical success because the agencies involved and the school worked so closely and efficiently together. Media attention does not square with the core business of planning to resume education as normal.

By way of endorsement, here is Jenny Stephen's robust account of how South Hampstead High School handled the media.

When it broke with us, as we were the first school other than the Devon school, the press was desperate to have a photo of the Tamiflu packet. I just emailed and then texted all the parents warning them of the presence of the TV cameras and what they wanted and asked them not to cooperate. The parents were wonderful and listened to me on both occasions.

The BBC wanted pictures of the children with their parents. Again they did not get them, although that first day they camped outside the drive from 3 until 9pm. I did not let the children hang around outside so the pictures could be taken; all the pupils had to come into school with their parents and then go out through a different exit so that no opportunities were given.

I also reminded the BBC that I would take an injunction out against them if they filmed any child under the age of 16. That Friday evening, although all the staff and pupils had





South Hampstead High School.

gone by 7.30, the BBC stayed as I suspected they wanted to catch me. So I sat it out until 9pm and when they packed up so did I.

Again when we came back they were over us like a swarm of locusts. Sky TV was the worst and was there from 1.50pm. On that day the whole school exited via the dustbin entrance and every girl understood why we wanted that, and cooperated – even the Year 11 girls whose muck up day it was. Again we texted the parents; the TV crews were furious and were heard to say “we don’t know why nobody will talk to us – we are only the news!”

I think it may have helped that we did not emphasise the hysteria with which some people approached the outbreak. I was determined to keep a dignified silence and we were fortunate that this worked.

Back to Antony Faccinello

Do you feel the school handled things in the right way?

We received expert support from the Health Protection Agency with whom we were in constant contact. Being guided by them meant we could assess the situation from an informed position.

What lessons have you learned?

Communication, both internal and external, is paramount. We knew we had a first-rate teaching and support staff before the incident, but after it, everyone else knew too.

And, talking of lessons, what preparations did the school

have in place for distance learning etc?

The heads of department with their teams produced innovative and appropriate work for each year group, including public examination years, and it was posted on the website within 24 hours.

What advice do you have for other schools?

Allocate specific roles to members of your SMT. Make sure your records for contacting parents and your own staff are up-dated regularly.

How did you manage the media?

The website was our main means of communication to parents, pupils and the outside world. Each day’s website updates became *de facto* press statements.

Were parents supportive?

We saw the Alleen’s community come together, brilliantly taking the situation in its stride. Parents were generous in their support for the way the situation was handled and appreciated the detail in the daily bulletins.

What does your experience tell you about the challenges of a second and perhaps more serious outbreak?

We would again be as cautious as we were at the outset, and once again we would be in the hands of the HPA, who by then would be prepared for dealing with a new form of the virus.

Antony Faccinello is senior deputy head at Alleen’s School. Jenny Stephen moved from being Head of the Grange School, Cheshire, to be Head of South Hampstead High School in 2005.

Waiting for the barbarians

A time to rant, and a time to get really angry

Angry old men deserve our pity. They are shortening their lives in the mistaken belief that since Jeremiah lived to be 170 it's safe to be furious. But everyone now knows that laughter is the best exercise, that optimism, however fatuous, is the best medicine, and that Paul was wrong not to identify hope as the greatest virtue. And anyway, 170 was quite young: after his devastating encounter with God, Job lived another 140 years and had a camel collection which was the envy of his neighbours.

Speaking in the East End of London, Michelle Obama made the case for education. I am here, she said, because of education. I never cut school. I loved getting As. I thought being smart was the coolest thing there was. You may look in vain for a similar statement from a British public figure.

We get ideological tripe about equal access, ministerial interference in admissions, but no coherent or plausible effort to support young people whose background does not encourage them to have academic aspirations. Cool is everything, and we must do what everybody does. Political correctness has eaten so deeply into the conscience of opinion formers that oppressive Stalinist rigour turns free thinkers into outlaws. Read Fiona Millar and be very afraid.

This is bad enough, but it is only part of a grim picture. The culture of celebrity, shocking parenting and appalling public values are all to blame for the thousands of poorly educated children in Britain. All our public values are against education. At a time when half-wits win talent contests, dim-wits appear as celebrities, and the role models offered to our children by the media are shopaholic bimbos, footballers and drug-fuelled pop stars, at the same time we continue to witness antique role models – the church, the law, doctors, teachers, even politicians – being despised and singled out for moralistic scrutiny. Drunk bishops, bent judges, and randy doctors are routinely lambasted, while innocent readers are invited to sympathise with Katie or Peter or both, or to admire the fact that though completely plastered, a nitwit celebrity is able to stumble out of a night club at three in the morning.

I take the conspiracy theory on the role of the media: human life is so miserable that we need to live vicariously. As a result the human potential locked in hidden lives has nothing to call it forth. You would need to be brave, independent, tenacious, thick skinned and imaginative to overcome domestic prejudice, unthinking attitudes and the sullen, relentless hostility of a peer group. And sometimes you can see, in marvellous schools, a leader of courage and vision who can say to a whole group of children, "We're going to be different."

When I first went into teaching, we wanted to introduce casual clothes for when kids were off duty, but we were always told that uniform guaranteed equality, and that a casual regime would enable inequality to flourish. Of course, the kids decided all to look identical (something we never achieved when we were in uniform). The media method of dealing with conspicuous intelligence or academic industry is to add: but he's quite normal really – he supports Fulham F C. By the time children get to school, the battle is already lost, as any primary school parent will know. And yet, despite the wave of tendentious and corrupting media lubricity and the relentless hostility shown towards toffs, spods and swots, it is possible to promote other values, and to make children who instinctively share those values feel energised and proud.

Nearly 20 years ago, Finland decided to become the most advanced and creative knowledge organisation in the world. The transformation has been staggering. Finland now tops most tables for the effectiveness of its education provision. And it's almost impossible to become a teacher. As we shield ourselves against the assault of Stalinist bureaucracy and the growing number of hopelessly adrift children in our society, we can take comfort in a consolatory sentence used surprisingly often in Finland. 'I'm sorry you've failed to become a teacher, but you can always get a job in Law or Medicine.' Wow!

Stephen Winkley is the Headmaster of Rossall School.



*“If I hum it,
would you
recognise the
tune?”*

Borth at the time of Uppingham's occupation. The Cambrian Hotel is at the distant end of the village.



Epidemics in schools: history repeats itself?

Nigel Richardson traces outbreaks in the last two centuries –
and sometimes the lessons ignored

For much of the past year, schools have found themselves trying to predict the likely impact of swine flu. Some turned to medical historians for advice – since problems of epidemic disease are far from a new phenomenon in schools.

In February 1938 a report was published by a committee of the Medical Research Council, acting in conjunction with the Ministry of Health (*Medical Research Council: Epidemics in Schools: An analysis of the Data collected during the first five years of a statistical enquiry – HMSO, 1938*). Its stated purpose was ‘to enquire into the prevalence and mode of the spread of epidemics in residential schools, especially those believed to be by droplet infection, and to report on the means by which they can be prevented or restricted’.

It had spent five years sifting vast amounts of statistical and other evidence on what, with no obvious irony, it termed ‘herd sickness’. Some of its conclusions are unsurprising: younger pupils were more at risk; illness tended to peak in the Lent term; day pupils tended to lose more time than boarders. Some data proved elusive or open to challenge: was the apparently greater vulnerability of girls to the common cold and other minor infections due to the fact that girls’ schools tended to be more cautious in keeping ailing pupils away from lessons?

It puzzled over patterns of measles, tuberculosis and jaundice, amongst many others, and it was unable to draw firm conclusions about the patterns of influenza spread from the consecutive epidemics of 1931, 1932 and 1933. It believed that there was ‘no evidence of an actively acquired immunity lasting for more than one year’, but it did, however, decide that removing tonsils appeared to have a beneficial effect.

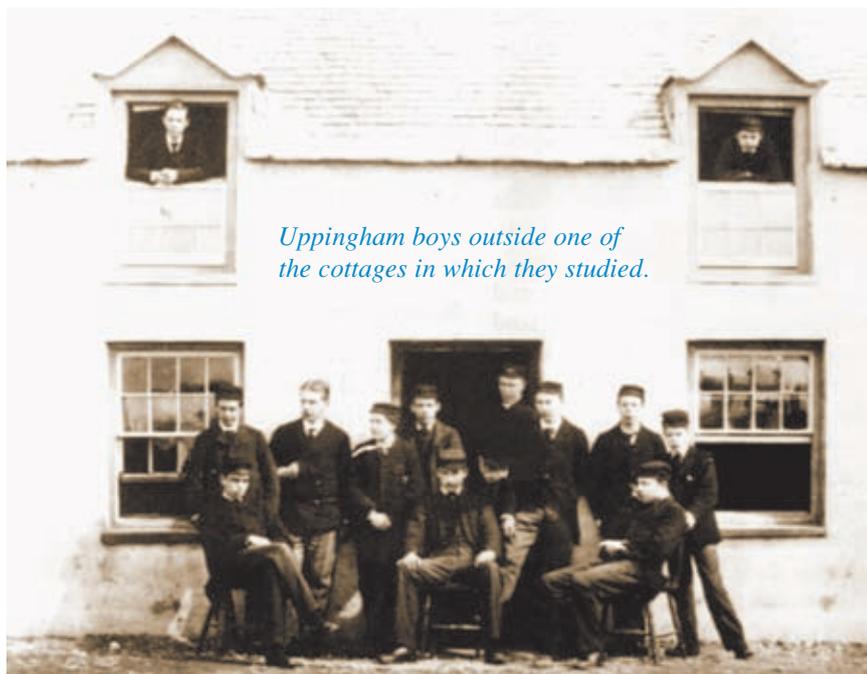
By its own admission, its inability to reach firm conclusions was disappointing. It stated that this was an interim report: ‘the first stage of a journey ... our general knowledge is still very incomplete, but it is increasing’.

Seventy years later, and after radical advances in medicine, its detail is probably only for the historian of medicine. More interesting for anyone studying the history of schools are the reasons why boarding schools were chosen for this research. In addition to the predictable statement that absence from school takes a toll both on the health and education of young people, the report stated that it had hoped ‘to see how far the lessons learned from experimental epidemiology with animal herds could be applied to human communities. Semi-isolated communities were perforce chosen, since completely isolated communities were not available.’

It further explained that 30 ‘great schools’ took part; that they were communities repeatedly topped up with new individuals, at highly susceptible ages; that they were ‘almost unmixed with adults’ and that ‘the herd immunity of a school is therefore lower than that of a natural community or family, where the proportion of adults and children is more equal’.

It also believed that ‘The British public schools play so large a part in social life, and their virtues and effects are so frequently discussed, as to make it seem remarkable that their value or their experience from the hygienic point of view has attracted comparatively little notice.’

The committee also suggested that there was a rich vein of history to these issues, and the report included a long introduction explaining how schools had repeatedly been hit by



Uppingham boys outside one of the cottages in which they studied.

epidemics of various types over seven centuries, and the temporary closures which had resulted. From the report itself, and a variety of other sources, it is possible to piece together a picture which shows how much we now take our comparative security for granted.

Typhoid was one recurring scourge: Uppingham pupils spent a year on the Welsh coast in 1876-7, and Lancing was struck by it in 1886. However, whereas the Uppingham outbreak was almost certainly due to foul water, Lancing's resulted from food: infected cream from a local dairy had been served at a summer cricket match against its former pupils.

Other frequent diseases included smallpox (especially before 1850) and influenza. Christ's Hospital suffered major bouts of ringworm in the 1830s: even sending the boys home failed to effect a cure, resulting in a vigorous campaign in *The Lancet* for better food and medical facilities. Charterhouse suffered a mumps epidemic in the 1860s; there was measles at Marlborough in 1846 and 1848 (which led to the college being closed).

Between 1852 and 1870 Marlborough also suffered 26 deaths: eight from pneumonia, three from meningitis, four from acute rheumatism, and two from appendicitis. At Radley influenza and fever caused occasional fatalities. Haileybury, founded in 1862, built its sanatorium only four years later; and early in-patients included victims of smallpox, typhoid and scarlet fever (23 cases in 1871 and 16 in 1873).

In scarlet fever, Haileybury had experienced one of the two particular epidemic scourges of boarding schools. It was nationally prevalent in this period, 1864, 1870 and 1874 being the worst years. It was rife in Eton in the 1840s – and at Winchester, where boys had been dispersed because of it in 1843. 'Terrible illness' struck the school again a year later, and 'half the inmates were prostrated' in 1846. Two sons of Headmaster Moberly died there in 1858 and 1871.

Harrow boys were sent home twice in the 1860s after it broke out there, along with other mysterious rashes which the doctors could not account for. Cranleigh was hit in 1863 within a year of

its opening. Wellington suffered three fatalities in 1870 and more in 1872 (as well as periodic septicaemia). Rossall, founded in 1884, suffered three deaths only six months after it opened. The coming of autumn each year posed a special threat. Even in 1896 it was a formidable disease, with a minimum of six weeks' confinement, with isolation in a room with a sheet steeped in carbolic over the door, and almost no visitors.

Diphtheria was the other major danger. Uppingham's experience of it in 1861 was comparatively minor, but Charterhouse suffered nine cases in 1886 who were:

'put in the same house, and on the same floor, as healthy boys ... due to the action of a housemaster and in spite of the opinion of the school doctor, who had urged removal to the sanatorium of each patient and strongly against the general exeat.'

Haileybury suffered two deaths in 1888, and many similar symptoms appeared between 1896 and 1906, resulting in 17 boys leaving the school

in one year. Only with better drainage did the problem disappear, but at Wellington even the complete drainage modernisation that followed the diphtheria outbreak of 1883 failed to prevent 'the cataclysm of 1891' – an outbreak which led to 41 boys being admitted to the sanatorium in November, two fatalities, a crisis of confidence amongst parents and (following the Uppingham example) temporary removal, to the Imperial hotel at Malvern for a term.

The Public Schools Commission, appointed in 1864, had made little reference to health, although it concluded that in general schools had kept up with the domestic and sanitary advances of recent decades and that 'hardy exercise' helped to keep sickness at bay. At St Paul's, however, it noted 'a great decline in the boys' health, due to overwork, fatigue, London born and bred, *ie* a delicate stock, and insufficient games and exercise'.

In the Public Schools Act of 1868 there was only a single paragraph allowing governing bodies to make regulations about the sanitation of schools. The *Lancet* continued its century-long campaign for better conditions in such schools, forming commissions of enquiry in 1861 and again in 1875 on its own initiative. These called for better hygiene and food in schools, for more comprehensive record-keeping, for parents to give notification of diseases suffered at home, and for medical examination of pupils on their return to school.

The second commission, on the eve of the Uppingham typhoid outbreak, praised the new sanatoria and water closets in some schools, but criticised poor ventilation and lighting, trapped drains and the leakage of sewer gas from town mains. It urged the appointment of a medical officer in all boarding schools.

Some Headmasters seem to have been more alert to medical dangers than other members of staff, perhaps because of the awful example of A C Tait, Arnold's successor at Rugby, who lost five of his own children to scarlet fever within five weeks in 1856. Despite this, when the governors of Rugby commissioned the local MOH to recommend improvements to boarding house sanitation and water supply, the housemasters had to be persuaded to comply, perhaps because Tait's loss occurred after

he had left the school. Other Headmasters, though, could perhaps have been more proactive. When a school's popularity waned, attacking the local authorities over faulty drainage could be a convenient diversionary tactic (as practised by Moberly at Winchester). But some were as reluctant as the local ratepayers to become involved in the prophylactic potential of good drains, whilst others avoided deaths at school by following the example of Glenalmond's Warden, who stated in 1858: "I will *not* have boys die here" and sent them home.

As T W Bamford explains in his book *Rise of the Public Schools: A Study of Boys' Public Boarding Schools in England and Wales from 1837 to the Present Day* (1967): 'Headmasters, like all men who have reform thrust upon them, ignored the problem as long as they could.' How might they have reacted to this report of 1887 from Clement Dukes, the M O at Rugby?

'I have seen cesspools at one of the most popular and expensive schools in the kingdom in such a state of repletion that it would be impossible for the boys to use them without defiling themselves with the decomposing ordure. I may add that I saw this condition, on the occasion I refer to, on the last day of the vacation, and the state of things had existed probably since the end of the previous term.'

Significantly, the Wellington College M O, Dr Barford, had complained about the state of its drains for 20 years before the 1891 diphtheria crisis, but had been dismissed by the governing body for suggesting that £20,000 was needed to put things right – following which he carried on an independent campaign in the newspapers and *The Lancet*. The 1930s MRC Report may have had Dr Barford in mind when it concluded that the role of the school doctor had become one of critical importance, and praised the role of the medical press in highlighting neglect or complacency.

* * * * *

In the end, however, events overtook the MRC's initiative. The Second World War meant that the MRC had new priorities, and thereafter the rapid development of public health under the NHS and new drugs to treat (eg) respiratory infections transformed the work of the school doctor.

The masters of Uppingham School at Borth in 1876.

The photographs accompanying this article come from Uppingham School's archives.



The Cambrian Hotel, Borth.

Within two decades, a number of HMC Headmasters were contemplating the future use for the vast and empty sanatorium that one of their predecessors had built (occasionally with an operating theatre, and at least one with a mortuary). Some turned them into girls' houses, as co-education grew in fashion from the 1960s.

Meanwhile one is left with the feeling that we tend greatly to underestimate this particular threat, under which our predecessors permanently laboured. At almost the same time as the MRC report came out, the best-known travel writer of the time published his autobiography. S P B Mais had worked as a young man at Rossall, Sherborne and Tonbridge. *All the days of my life* (Hutchinson, 1937) includes the words: 'I have often envied a Headmaster his job. The only accident he has to fear is an epidemic.'

Nigel Richardson is a former Chairman of HMC, and the author of Typhoid in Uppingham: Analysis of a Victorian town and school in crisis 1875-7 published by Pickering and Chatto. He is currently writing a biography of the great Victorian Headmaster Edward Thring.



Toughen up in Liverpool

Roger Mobs survives an outbreak of Scouse Fever

Matron adjusted the colourful new prospectus in the limp hand of a fellow head. “The Liverpool Adelphi’s seriously weakened his faith in the power of marketing as well, I’m afraid.”

She moved to the next bed where a home counties’ Headmistress rocked back and forth, chewing her hair and singing to the tune of *Yesterday*:

HMC.

You made us stay in the Ade-elphi.

Not those nice new hotels by the sea.

Oh what possessed you, HMC?

“I know, dearie,” comforted Matron. “That naughty retiring Secretary, Mr Peel, wanted all you posh Heads to toughen up in Liverpool, didn’t he? He was probably the same man who put an S in the word ‘lisp’. Never mind. You’ll be right as rain if you just keep looking at the pictures on these cards. Tell Matron what you see.”

“Boater, lacrosse pitch, Boden blouse ...”

“You’ll be fine sweetie. Just don’t widen access anytime soon.”

“But they must have known, Matron,” called another Head from within his straps. “They must have read the Adelphi’s reviews. Why do people keep running over a string a dozen times with their vacuum cleaner, then reach down, pick it up, examine it, then put it down to give their vacuum one more chance?”

“Tell a man there are 400 billion stars and he’ll believe you, Matron. Tell him a bench has wet paint and he has to touch it. Mark my words.”

“Why do they use sterilized needles for death by lethal injection, Matron? Why?”

Matron smiled through the distress.

“That’s enough now, everyone. It was only a hotel. Come on let’s try again like good Heads ... Boater, lacrosse pitch, Boden blouse... Do it for Matron.”

I stood behind the nurse and stared down the avenue of beds. Delirious voices rambled erratically about charitable status: “Suzi Leather’s not a vegetarian because she loves animals, Mobs. She’s a vegetarian because she hates plants... And if it’s true that independent schools are here to help the others, then what exactly are the *others* here for? Ha, ha! What’s that Matron? Look, if God had wanted me to touch my toes, woman, he’d have put them on my knees...”



Latest medical bulletins.

“Who should we be snuggling up to, Matron?” screamed a careerist youngster. “Ed Balls or Michael Gove?”

“Well I’m no expert, sweetie,” said the nurse tucking in the questioner, “but my policy is never to take a sleeping pill and a laxative on the same night.”

I left the ward. My thoughts flew back to conference, and my own room: 668 ... the neighbour of the beast. Around the Adelphi, dawn was nature’s way of telling the locals it was time to go to bed, and so it was that they gathered in the room next to mine at 5am for surreally Liverpoolian conflicts: “I didn’t say it was your fault. I said I’m blaming you.” The noise inevitably woke me, and each night confirmed that the Mobs shinbone is merely a device for finding furniture in a dark room.

On the last night, I had barely taken the Cro-Magnon lift down to reception where I could find only the Adelphi’s resident palmist and tarot reader. I spoke solemnly:

“Black Elvira, I do not feel up to speed on A* grades and university offers. If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not, then help me now.”

She stared into her Babycham.

“The faster you fall behind, Mr Mobs, the more time you’ll have to catch up. Five quid please.”

“Mobs, The Charity Commission are your good friends. If you were both on a sinking Mersey ferry together and there was only one life jacket ... they would miss you heaps and think of you often.”

Puzzled and poorer, I wandered out into the streets of the waking city, past the titanic public buildings of the business area and on to the Mersey, where the two Liver Birds gazed from on high across the cold grey spread of water. I stared through the mists at the huge copper creatures. Suddenly, they looked down and spoke as one:

“Mobs, The Charity Commission are your good friends. If you were both on a sinking Mersey ferry together and there was only one life jacket ... they would miss you heaps and think of you often.”

The mist and the spray and the morning swirled.

* * * * *

“Sir. Sir!”

“Yes, Maddy?”

“Sir, you’ve been daydreaming again. You’re supposed to be teaching us about Florence Nightingale but you’ve been staring out the window at the birds for ages.”

A junior choir was singing *Yesterday* in a neighbouring classroom.

“Sorry, Maddy. Got lost in my own thoughts rather. Where is everybody?”

“The class all bunked off sir. They got bored when you were pretending to drown.”

“Bunked off? What, all of them?”

“All but me, sir. I’m worried about you. You haven’t been the same since you came back from Liverpool. Are you OK, sir?”

“Yes, Maddy, I’m fine. I just feel sometimes that ... well ... in my game it’s easier to go along with the flow. Easier than fighting it all.”

The choir’s distant voices told me they believed in yesterday.

“What would you do Maddy? Would you fight?”

“Well sir, some people say ‘If you can’t beat them, join them.’ I say ‘If you can’t beat them, beat them,’ because they will be expecting you to join them, so you will have the element of surprise.”

Roger V Mobs is a Stoic pragmatist.

Not for the faint-hearted

April McGoldrick describes Birkenhead School’s approach to creative writing

Here at Birkenhead School, when I became head of English three years ago, I met the kind of scenario described by Richard Evans in *Conference & Common Room* (Summer, 2009). We were an all boys’ school then, with boys very surely pigeonholed into the types mentioned by Richard: sporty, academic or musical.

As a department we have tried to provide boys with the opportunity to value their creative talents and initially we met with some resistance. The excellent YouTube clip by Sir Ken Robinson, ‘Do schools kill creativity?’ spurred us on, as did the Curriculum 2020 conference at The Grange School in Cheshire, which suggested that in the future educational climate, creativity will be prized far more than it is at present and will be seen as a most valuable asset by employers.

So we consciously tried to make space in our curriculum to allow for creativity, from Year 7 through to A level classes. For instance, Year 7 pupils look at how effectively humour is presented in *The Simpsons* and write their own episodes. In Year 8 pupils design their own adverts and film them or act them out. An embarrassing example of this can be found on YouTube. One highly creative but perhaps overly enthusiastic group invented an Invincigrip (the most amazingly powerful paperclip) and persuaded a couple of teachers to demonstrate its merits. These clips (*sic*) can be found by searching ‘Mrs McGoldrick’ (470 hits to date) or ‘Miss Burns’.

Year 9 students had great fun developing their commercial creativity. We formed an intimidating Dragons’ Den panel, consisting of a CDT technician, an ICT teacher and a particularly critical member of SMT, to challenge their entre-

preneurial inventions. The ‘dragons’ professed their willingness to invest in a number of highly innovative projects designed by the pupils.

Our policy also involved us opting for the WJEC A level literature specification. This has an assessed element of creative writing in it, the only specification with this distinctive element on offer. The take up for this has proved to be a marked success, with groups rising from a disappointing five students opting for A level literature in 2007 to a more respectable 20 in 2009.

The decision to opt for this specification was taken as a result of a conference organised by Dr Adrian Barlow. He actively encouraged heads of English to weigh up the merits and demerits of each new literature specification from a purely objective stance. As he puts it in Chapter 1 of *Teaching Literature in Context*, his exceptionally useful A level literature book, ‘at a time when creativity is once more valued as a central



Writers' workshop.

Output

focus of literary study it is right to attend again to the act of writing, and not only to the act of reading’.

Further, he draws attention to the fact that, ‘The word “creative” had been notably missing from the original Curriculum 2000 Subject Criteria.’ This has been amended and in the revision students are required to ‘articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts. Literature students will now be assessed as writers as well as readers. This is a fundamental shift, and its consequences will take a while to register.’

An integral part of the way we teach this course has been a residential creative writing weekend at Ty Newydd, near Criccieth, the National Writers’ Centre for Wales, run by the Taliesin Trust and subsidised by the Welsh arts foundation. Sixth-form students of both literature and language are invited to attend. This weekend jockeys for position with an impressive list of sports fixtures, choir practices, maths olympiads and exchange programmes.

We have managed to elbow our way in and make a place for this as well, both in the school’s calendar and in the boys’ psyches, and it has proved equally popular with the girls who have joined the school since it became fully coeducational.

There is now solid recognition from the students that creative writing is not namby-pamby, neither is it for the faint-hearted. You need as much bravery and strength to produce an original

piece of writing as you require on the rugby pitch. One of our tutors, Cliff Yates, gave some truly inspirational poetry workshops and we use his excellent book, *Jumpstart*, to develop our teaching of poetry with all of our classes. We share the central tenet of his philosophy ‘that reading and writing poetry are interconnected activities. For young people to approach writing poetry with confidence and ambition they not only have to be familiar with a range of poetry, but also to be in the habit of seeing texts “from the inside” that is, as writers.’

Some of our students have demonstrated serious talent. Lower sixth student Michael Williams wrote the following brief account of the first moments of the weekend in his own distinctive, wry style, concluding with an elegant haiku:

‘As soon as we got there, we were thrown in at the deep end of writing creatively, and told to write for two minutes non-stop. “If you stop,” we were told, “you’re doing it wrong.” Nobody wanted to do it wrong, so we duly obliged. It’s harder than it sounds, you know. Try it yourself, if you ever have two spare minutes and an abundance of creative juices. You’d be surprised.

Write? For two minutes?
Can I just write the word “argh”
Again and again?’

April McGoldrick is head of English at Birkenhead School.



Tower poets in the city of dreaming spires

Recent articles in *Conference & Common Room* have celebrated a significant upturn in interest in writing generally and poetry in particular amongst Britain's sixth formers. For most teenagers who write poetry, the biggest reward they can probably imagine is that someone, somewhere, will publish their carefully constructed lines. But, in a few months time, seven teenage poets will not only receive publication and public recognition, they will also receive cash prizes ranging from £250 up to a remarkable £3000.

These prizes will go to the winners of the Christopher Tower Poetry Competition 2010, which was launched on October 6th, 2009. The competition is run by Christ Church, Oxford, and is open to all sixth-form students in the UK. The competition was first staged in 2000, and in recent years it has grown enormously in popularity. In 2008/9 for instance, the number of competition entries received was double that of the previous year.

"We are really excited by the increase in interest in the Tower Poetry Competition," says Peter McDonald, one of the judges. "Our purpose is to ignite in teenagers the desire to experience poetry as a poet – something that can greatly enhance the young person's grasp of the form. The rise in interest we are seeing means that young students are being encouraged to write poetry themselves, and this encourages them to consider poetry as an integral part of their lives – something to be experienced for its own value, as well as to be experienced as part of their formal education."

Each year entrants have to write a single poem on a nominated theme. For the 2010 competition, the theme is 'Promises', to be considered by the judges, Stephen Romer, Michael Schmidt and Peter McDonald, whose credentials are briefly listed at the end of this article. Many of the competition's past winners have gone on to achieve further recognition for their writing in other competitions or in the publishing world, including Helen Mort, who won the Young Poet prize in the Manchester Poetry Competition in 2008, and Annie Katchinska, one of eight new poets in The Faber New Poets programme.

"Having read the poems of past winners, I am amazed at their quality and their variety, in terms of form and content. There is passion and freshness, as I would hope and expect in the poems of young adults, but there is also a sophistication of thought, perceptible in the tone, and of feeling, perceptible in the rhythm.

"One great practitioner of the art said poetry was made of more than usual order combined with more than usual emotion; that such a statement still, apparently, has relevance today, especially among young adults, is consoling. For they understand, and as I hope the candidates for this year's prize will find, the crucial importance, and the satisfaction, of finding the Best Words and putting them in the Best Order," says Stephen Romer.



Tom Tower, Christ Church.

Students can enter the competition themselves or via their school, and the schools of the winning poets will also receive cash prizes. **The closing date for entries is 11th February, 2010, and entries by email will not be accepted.** More information about the competition and entry forms may be found at www.towerpoetry.org.uk/prize

Stephen Romer's poetry collections include *Idols* (1986); *Plato's Ladder* (1992); and *Tribute* (1998). His latest collection of poetry is *Yellow Studio* (2008) which was shortlisted for the 2008 T S Eliot Prize.

Michael Schmidt is the editor of *P N Review* and Professor of Poetry in the Department of English, University of Glasgow. His most recent anthology, *The Great Modern Poets*, was published by Quercus on National Poetry Day 2006. His collection of poems *The Resurrection of the Body* was published in January 2007.

Peter McDonald has lectured at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and the University of Bristol. In 1999, he became the first holder of the Christopher Tower Studentship and Tutorship in Poetry in the English Language at Christ Church, Oxford, also holding a lectureship in the English Faculty of Oxford University. His publications include *Louis MacNeice: The Poet in his Contexts* (1991); *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (1997); *Pastorals* (2004); and *The House of Clay* (2007).

For gifted and talented



Segovia Cathedral.

Hay Segovia, broadening horizons on the plains of Spain

As the teacher newly appointed to run the nascent Enrichment Programme at Hereford Cathedral School, the opportunity to take a group of students to the Hay Festival in Segovia was too good to miss. Although much smaller in scale than the main May festival in the town of Hay itself, Hay Segovia offers five days in late September of talks, workshops, readings and performance on a fascinating range of topics, all taking place in the *centro historico* of one of Spain's most beautiful cities. The possibilities offered by a trip to such an event, for a small group of students with a lively interest in pushing their learning beyond the classroom, were obvious and enticing.

Like many schools we have wrestled with how best to tackle the increasingly evident need to cater for the gifted and talented. How do we identify them? What do we offer them? Having identified them what do we call them? When do we start to offer whatever programme we put together and how do we deal with those parents who, having paid up for private education, perhaps correctly see it as our job to ensure every child we teach falls into the Gifted and Talented category?

While these debates have been going on, our approach has been to attempt to get as many opportunities and events in place as quickly as possible, moving the programme forward from discussion to concrete and worthwhile activity.

The guiding principles have been to target as broad a group of students as possible, offering experiences that go beyond the school curriculum and which might further develop an ability a student has already demonstrated or ignite an interest they had not previously considered. Students must show a willingness to make the most of these opportunities, but the groups involved have by no means simply consisted of the top academic performers in a year since we are not seeking to create an exclusive elite.

A link with the Animation Department at the City of Birmingham University led to a group of Year 9 pupils spending a day using the latest Mac technology to produce stop and flash motion films, whilst plans are also in place to involve some of our GCSE students in a joint project with a top London advertising agency.

We have also been very fortunate that, for the past two years, Peter Florence, director of the Hay Festival, has allowed a small group of our sixth formers to undertake work experience at the Festival during the May half-term. There, amongst other things, they have shadowed journalists, written for the Festival blog and interviewed various writers. This in turn has led to the chance for us to further this link by attending the Hay Festival in Segovia.

In terms of the guiding principles behind our enrichment programme, it is hard to imagine a single visit which fulfils so

many of our requirements. Students are exposed to talks, discussions, interviews, workshops and films on an extraordinarily broad range of topics, many of which are significantly challenging, always thought-provoking and leading to some excellent project work.

In a single day on our recent visit, students spent the morning in a 12th-century Templar Church, had lunch with the Guardian Award winning author Jenny Valentine, spent two hours in the afternoon attending a class in Spanish at the local University on producing a video blog, listened to Italian author Claudio Magris discuss the state of Europe, before finally retiring to bed in the early hours after watching an Israeli film on the conflict in the Lebanon.

Additionally, given the historical wealth of Segovia and the fact that the logistics of the visit allowed the group to spend a day in Madrid, the possibilities for further 'enrichment' were always on hand. Even the painfully slow train journey from Madrid to Segovia meant students got a good sighting of the enormous cross rising from the sierra at the Valle de los Caidos, marking the burial spot of Franco himself and his fellow fascist Primo de Rivera. Meanwhile the very mountains the train wound through provided the setting for Hemmingway's civil war novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Once in Segovia we discovered that our hostel was at the foot of the extraordinary Roman Aqueduct which bestrides one of the main routes into the town and which continues to provoke admiration both as a feat of engineering and as an indication of the efforts that went into maintaining the empire abroad.

Many of the events themselves took place in Romanesque churches, whilst a visit to the cavernous Cathedral in the centre of the city allowed students a close up of the final gothic cathedral to be built in Spain. The fact that Queen Isabel of Castilla was crowned in a small church off the main plaza in Segovia also meant students learned about the unification of Spain and the subsequent expulsion of the Moors, which in turn led to discussions on the Madrid bomb attacks by Al Qaeda in 2004 and even the significance of pork in Spanish cooking – claimed by many, perhaps apocryphally, to have originated as a way of reinforcing non-Muslim identity in the 15th century.

Segovia, a bastion of conservative Spain, has turned the cooking of milk-fed piglets into an art form, but urging students through a plateful of baby pig was

perhaps taking the idea of an enrichment programme a step too far, or at least, too literally!

Several of the students were keen linguists and they were given plenty of opportunities to put their Spanish to practical use. However, it was perhaps equally illuminating for these students to spend time in environments where the variety of languages being used was clearly not a barrier to understanding, but rather an indication of mutual beliefs and shared interests across cultures. Meanwhile, the students felt a sense of personal achievement in their successful ability to put their knowledge of languages to the test in some fairly highbrow events.

In the space of 72 hours the group saw and enjoyed everything from a talk on the future of Spanish wine to a workshop on storytelling for children. They listened to recollections of the revolution in Romania in 1989, saw Picasso's *Guernica* in the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and witnessed some authentic flamenco in a back street *tabla*. If it's enrichment you're after, it really is hard to think of a better single event.

James Petrie is a senior teacher at Hereford Cathedral School.



Roman Aqueduct.

Back to The Old Century?

Hugh Wright speculates on the changing nature of university entrance

Just as schools were beginning to settle into the autumn term and careers departments, heads of sixth form, parents and Year 13 pupils were turning their attention to the academic future beyond school, the Confederation of British Industries announced the outcome of its Higher Education Task Force study which warns that tough choices must be made to ensure that UK universities remain world class.

'Tough choices' is business speak for charging more and, since this is a 'triple whammy', in the mid-Atlantic argot that newspapers and politicians think we are most likely to understand, their plan involves higher fees, bigger loan repayments and fewer grants. The National Union of Students professed itself "astonished" (has it never come across the CBI before?) and those of us who benefited from the welfare state educational experience, despair at the way things are now.

We have, of course, been here before, so let me take two cases of entry to Cambridge in "the old century", as Siegfried Sassoon called it in the title of the first volume of his autobiography. Sassoon and Kit Nicholson (Ben's youngest brother) both came from wealthy, well-connected families and both by the age of 18 had shown no academic promise. Both left school from the fifth forms and went straight to Cambridge, Sassoon in 1906 and Nicholson in 1923.

The intervening Great War had made no difference to the procedure. Entry was gained by taking 'Little Go', fairly elementary exams in the core subjects, (though Sassoon needed to go to a crammer to pass it) and there were presumably

recommendations and interviews. The ability to pay was paramount, especially for commoner entry.

Siegfried Sassoon quotes his last school report as saying 'Lacks power of concentration; shows no particular aptitude for any branch of his work; seems unlikely to adopt any special career'. He was then in the lower fifth. To quote him again, 'I had no future as a Marlburian. I couldn't have stayed on for another year even if I had wanted to, since I wasn't in a high enough form to avoid superannuation at the age of eighteen.'

Apart from anything else, relaxed tuition at home to the age of 14 and frequent absences through illness had taken their toll. Kit Nicholson's case at Gresham's was little different, though he had more orthodox schooling during the war before going to Gresham's. This came soon after one of his brothers was killed fighting and his mother died (of flu caught from her son while on leave) very late in the war. Not an easy time to go away to school and perhaps part of the reason for his slow progress. He was there for five years and left from the fifth forms at the age of 18.4.

Two of the others in his form, W H Auden and Michael Spender, Stephen's brilliant elder brother, were more than two years younger. He too must have met with the age limit Sassoon encountered at Marlborough. Promotion to a higher form in both schools was always on ability not age. Interestingly it made no difference to success and responsibility in other areas of the school's life, nor to one's eligibility for entry into Oxford or Cambridge. Kit Nicholson went straight up to Jesus College,

Alice handling the triple whammy.



Cambridge from the fifth forms at Gresham's. The university careers of these two were in marked contrast and their subsequent success could not have been predicted. Sassoon left after five terms having failed all exams, first in law and then in history. He said he was unable to retain anything from the set texts and he could not read for an ordinary, as opposed to honours, degree because he was particularly useless at maths which was compulsory.

He was, though, a devotee of the antiquarian book section of Bowes and Bowes and entered for a university poetry prize, again without success. Some would say an ideal background for a poet. Kit Nicholson, after a slow start with a Third at the end of his first year in the School of Architecture, got Firsts and scholarships at the end of the next two and spent the following year at Princeton before returning to Cambridge to teach in his old department. He became the leading architect of the modernist school in the 1930s and was killed, tragically young, in a crash while gliding in the World Championships in the Alps.

And what do we learn from that? Most obviously that society has changed and that the academic world is now completely different. But also that if the CBI has its way, students will return financially to where they were *mutatis mutandis* in 'The Old Century', or even the one before that. How will that affect admissions policies or plans for wider access? Are we to conclude that what goes round inevitably comes round and that the ability to pay will replace academic ability as the key qualification for matriculation?

Take a third case. In 1729, the great Dr Johnson's parents, realising their son was unusually brilliant, broke social ranks to send him to Pembroke College, Oxford, tempted by a rich friend who said he would pay for his accommodation and by a small legacy to his mother. His father would send such money as he could spare. The rich friend let them down and in a year or two his father went bankrupt.

After a time of not being able to afford lectures during which he heard them second hand from a friend in Christ Church, and refusing all offers of gifts of clothes, shoes and money, Johnson returned home without a degree in 1732, shoeless, penniless and depressed. He did not go back to Pembroke for 25 years, though he described it as "a nest of singing birds" and left his books to the College library. His story represents a strand of social history that looks set to return in some form or other in 'the new century'.

Even politicians cannot reasonably insist on widening access to universities and then, leaving parents out of the equation, say that all those accepted, whatever their means, have to pay ever greater sums both while there and forever afterwards in repayments of loans or by graduate taxes.

If they do, the modern undergraduate Alice will recognise them as Humpty Dumpty figures who reserve the right to make up their own meaning for words, as she finds herself running to keep up with payments that stretch ahead into a future where employment prospects may well be a mirage. And the 18 year-old Sam, from a family that, like Dr Johnson's, does not have a safety net, will become even more of a rarity at all our universities as we are driven back to the old century or even the one before.

Hugh Wright was Headmaster of Gresham's School, Chief Master of King Edward's School (Birmingham) and Chairman of HMC.

HERE & THERE

If you have news of topical interest, however brief, for 'Here and There', please email it to Dr Stephen Coyne at head.kingsmac@rmpc.co.uk

Items should not exceed 150 words.

Good colour photographs are also welcome.



Double Derbyhaven triumph for Sophie!

Last year's winner of the annual King William's College Derbyhaven Bay swim is celebrating after retaining her title in 2009!

Fifteen year old Sophie White came home in a time of 15 minutes – almost a minute faster than the runner-up, Sam Fry, and almost two minutes ahead of the fastest teacher taking part, Mike Hebden.

This year, 27 pupils (13 boys and 14 girls) and eight members of staff took part in the half-mile Derbyhaven Bay swim. The event was a handicap race until 1890; 2009 is the 112th time the swim has taken place since results began to be recorded in 1891.

Sophie received both the Winner's Trophy and the Joanna Crookall Trophy which is awarded to the first female finisher. Sam's runner-up time meant both swimmers recorded faster times than they have done in previous years.

What to say to our sixth formers

Tim Hands, Chairman of the Universities Sub-Committee, surveys past difficulties and future issues

Ten years ago, Laura Spence, a medicine candidate from a state school in the North West of England, was rejected by the University of Oxford. Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, made much of it to the TUC. It was, he said, an absolute scandal, brought about by “an old establishment interview system”. Enter furore.

The Laura Spence Debacle (or LSD) defines the years of Blair and Brown. Whatever its rights and (more precisely) wrongs, the consequent political agenda could only be focused on equality, access and transparency. More subtly, however, LSD was the necessary prelude to the introduction of top-up fees, the issue over which Blair was to face his largest ever back bench revolt. Only by raising the access debate could Blair seek to divert attention from the fee agenda, and allow that debate to become a driving force for top-up change.

Prima facie, LSD appeared to augur an old fashioned antipathy to independent schools and a new period of admissions problems for their pupils. It should however have been obvious that introducing a bigger fee structure in tertiary education would be unlikely to operate to the detriment of that part of the secondary sector already accustomed to self-finance.

Two subsequent events proved critical. The first was a conspiracy born of cock up: the A level fiasco of 2002, in which independent Heads exposed political pressure to inflate exam grades. The second, the Bristol boycott of 2003, was, by subtle contrast, a cock up born of a conspiracy. Both events were equally expertly – even consummately – sired. Both won the independent sector acclaim. Overnight the sector became the guardian of traditional educational standards and the watchdog of good British fair play. Joe Public cheered.

Of the two events, the more significant was the Bristol boycott. Adroitly handled by Philip Evans, it threw the maintained and independent sectors into different corners they

actually did not wish to inhabit. It demonstrated proleptically that as the strengths of the independent sector became the reverse of the maintained sector’s emerging weaknesses, the kinship between independent schools and universities would be unintentionally and ironically exposed and strengthened.

If traditional subjects (maths, physics, engineering, modern languages) were to be maintained in universities, then those universities could in future have little time for bogus qualifications, or for soft subjects, or for arbitrary attempts at social experiment – especially if the independent sector bared its teeth at them. In other words, a new road map was drawn: the route to engineering could no longer pass through Thomas Telford.

These issues drew considerable media attention. Significantly, and in accordance with its marketing policy, it was *The Times* that gave Spence and Bristol the greatest coverage. *The Times* seeks to persuade those readers with children in independent schools that they might be better off in the maintained sector – and of course *vice versa*. It encourages the sense that both kinds of reader can only compensate for their mistake (whilst also confirming their prejudice) by continuing to buy the paper and studying its stories.

As a marketing policy it is a double-sided coin and a guaranteed winner: headlines we win; tales you lose. It helped to sustain throughout the Blair/Brown years two frequently remarked yet incompatible myths. The first was that all universities discriminate against independent school candidates; the second was that they all discriminate in favour of them.

In the past six months a new order has become clearer. Surveys by Sam Friedman and his successors at ISC, based on HMC and GSA data, demonstrated over five successive years no prejudice against independent school candidates. More recently, William Richardson’s compendious report presented at HMC conference has shown from the government’s own data that the

HERE & THERE

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Abingdon’s Mark Turner is Best Headmaster

Mark Turner, Headmaster of Abingdon School, has been nominated by *Tatler* as the Best Headmaster of 2009. “I am delighted to accept the prestigious ‘Best Headmaster of the Year 2009’ award from *Tatler* on behalf of all the boys and staff at Abingdon School. Credit must go to the whole Abingdon community who work tirelessly for the good of the School. Over recent years, our excellent academic results, together with high levels of both involvement and success in all areas of extra-curricular life, have raised Abingdon’s profile internationally as a leading independent school,” says Mark.

Tatler researches schools annually for the award, talking to pupils, leavers, parents and past and present Heads, in order to get an overall view of the school. Once all the information has been gathered, a small committee at *Tatler* makes the final decision about the winners.



Magdalen Tower.

bond between independent schools and universities, especially top universities, has been strengthened – particularly in those subjects identified by government as strategically important.

Universities and independent schools are thus no longer expertly perceived as political enemies but as structurally and philosophically akin. Both have a commitment to education as a facilitator of social mobility. Both value academic excellence and prize their independence from government. Both select, usually and wisely bearing context in mind. And both charge fees.

A General Election, and with it the possibility of a new party in power, will soon be the talk of the Westminster Village. After that election it may take more than Two Brains to chart a wise way forward for universities in a period of savagely reduced funding. “A University should be a place of light, of liberty and of learning,” argued the progenitor of Conservatism, Benjamin Disraeli (his vision perhaps the clearer for not having been to one). In the new era of Conservatism, will the cost of the bills for the light mean that the liberty and learning have to fall for a while into the shadows?

It seems unlikely that all universities can survive. Those exerting the greatest claim to continued funding are likely to be those that can prove they make the greatest strategic contribution. As for young people, they may well have to choose between a university course and unemployment – supposing that declining tuition hours leave significant distinction between the two.

So pity the poor young person. And offer them the best possible advice. A new era is coming to universities and the prevailing methods and underlying principles for success are clear.

Wise men, the good book tells us, seek a star. But very wise men seek lots of them. The new A level qualification is with us by stealth, prominent as the first element of the UCAS form. So avoid the murder of the innocents. Aim to pursue those stars.

Do not be afraid of modifiers, relatively unimportant though they already are. For modifiers are already themselves being modified as universities line themselves up for the next phase of

trying to attract the best candidates. At least two Russell group universities have decided that they can use the avoidance of modifiers as a marketing ruse to attract independent school candidates. Shop around. Divide and be cool.

Remember also the first Heineken Law of university life. Selecting universities are all subject to a fairly stringent quality control mechanism which regularises standards of teaching. Furthermore, a pint of lager tastes much the same on one campus as it does on another. But never forget Heineken’s second Law. Some universities can reach the departments (and prospective employers) others cannot reach. So (again) aim high. Quality is likely to be the watchword of the future. The market will always respond to it.

Don’t forget your other activities. Universities will need to market themselves as being attractive for more than work alone. Durham, ironically (or perhaps not), has set a precedent. It assesses nine things in every candidate: extra curricular profile is one of them. Play up, play up, and hide your former shame.

Lastly, remember the law of unintended matrimonial consequence. The chances are you are likely to meet your long-term partner at university (as I did, Dear Reader). You have some choice over your partner; but, in the lottery that is the current admissions scene, probably little over your choice of university. There are some decisions in life that are made for you. And these are often the more important ones.

So, young person, relax. A new currency is now with us. Bid farewell to pounds, shillings and Spence. The old days weren’t bad and the new days may be tough. But, in real terms, they are also unlikely to be worse. So chin up, chest out, and reach deep into your pocket. The feeling of that new currency will not altogether be a bad one. Already, the days of LSD are over.

*Dr Tim Hands is the Master of
Magdalen College School, Oxford.*



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Into Africa

Gardner Thompson provides background to HMC's Africa Schools Group

Other schools were already in the field, but for us it all began serendipitously in 2005, at my cousin's Silver Wedding anniversary party. Taking time off from the domestic celebration, my cousin told me about a school in Uganda which was looking for financial support for its development plan, and she asked whether the boys of Dulwich College, where I was the academic deputy, might like to help.

I already had enough experience of Africa to be wary. I had taught in Uganda for two years, in the early 1970s; I had subsequently written a PhD thesis on British colonial rule there; and I had more recently been back to find a country which, though at last free of Amin and Obote, hardly resembled the young Winston Churchill's 'Pearl of Africa'.

So I needed a dependable first-hand personal recommendation to persuade me. My cousin's twin brother, a world expert on chimpanzees, had worked in the country for many years and had come to respect a Ugandan colleague, who had risen to the top of wild life conservation in the country, and who was now governor of a poor, rural, secondary school near the Kenyan border.

Reassured, I did what others had done: took a deep breath, trusted in what experience I had, and began. A 'non-uniform day' raised a lump sum towards the planned science block; and, as I had promised the boys that every penny they raised would reach the school, I then found myself flying off – with £3000 worth of US dollars inside my jacket – to deliver the money in person. The Archdeacon blessed the foundation stone of the new building; and *The New Vision*, one of Uganda's national English-language newspapers, proclaimed 'Buwembe School Gets Boost'. We had made a start.

Festina lente. Over the next couple of years or so, Dulwich boys raised more money to complete the building, with the US embassy, impressed by the school's accounting procedures, adding some dollars of its own; and we sent out two consignments of science and maths books.

In September 2008, two ex-sixth formers went on a month's inaugural gap-year assignment and another pair followed a year later. In the meantime, two teachers went out for a fortnight of their 2009 summer holiday – like the boys, hoping to be useful while also finding out 'on the ground' how the link might best be further developed.

In fact, the most exciting new development has been the launch of a sponsorship scheme. Like so many of the best initiatives in this project, the idea came from the Headmistress. She has around 600 students, but very few can afford, on graduating from Buwembe with good O levels, to go on to study A levels elsewhere and thereby gain admission to university (where again education is subsidised by the state).

We were asked: might we be able to support one or two of the brightest and most deserving of these students in such a way? The project appealed strongly to Dulwich boys – themselves in many cases beneficiaries of bursaries, in 'the Dulwich tradition' – and this time it was not just a 'mufti' day but also a pop con-



The Archdeacon blesses the foundation stone.

cert put on by Year 10 boys which raised enough money to get things going and to fund, as I write, the first two scholars.

During these years, we looked for and tested our own ways of developing our link, stumbling as others have, I suspect, on the way, but I was very fortunate to tap into the wisdom of two people with far more experience than I had in this challenging world. One is a colleague from another HMC school with its own established link in Uganda, the other is the wife of that cousin out in the chimp forest who was working in schools and was also connected with a sponsorship scheme.

Meanwhile, as an ISI inspector I had come across HMC schools with African links which pre-dated Dulwich's. It was perhaps these visits which eventually led me to reflect that if, like us, other schools were each learning lessons individually and separately, by trial and error, it could make sense to bring key teachers in these schools together so that we could benefit from each other's experience. I discovered that there was one local grouping, but nothing for HMC as a whole.

The new Master of Dulwich College, Joe Spence, immediately gave me the same sort of encouragement I had received from the outgoing Graham Able. It was Joe's letter to all HMC Heads in September 2009 that asked for information about existing links and proposed an informal HMC grouping of interested schools.

What followed exceeded my expectations, both in number and enthusiasm. We received responses from over 60 schools, 45 of them with an established link, and with most of the remainder thinking of setting one up.

As it happens, Uganda currently appears to have the most links (11), then South Africa (8) and Malawi (7). Interestingly, West Africa is represented by Gambia and Sierra Leone but not by the most populous state in Africa, Nigeria. The 45 then received a substantial questionnaire; and all received the promise of an

Output



Behind the bike sheds!

invitation to an inaugural day conference at Dulwich.

But, what is the point? Some observers of Africa's condition argue that 'aid' in all its forms only feeds corruption and breeds dependency: 'they' cannot become responsible for their own fate and develop organically as long as 'we' interfere with our initiatives. At the long term, strategic level this may be a strong case. But at another level – local, personal, specific and current – the case for some kind of immediate action remains irresistible.

Moreover, relationships between schools can deliver a mutuality of benefit through interdependency; and there are ways to monitor movements of money. Above all, though, personal encounters through school links can dismantle false assumptions on both sides.



Buwembe School.

To take an obvious example from the British end: individual visiting students find something of the 'real' Africa behind the conventional images of destitution and dictatorship, while, through what the link reveals, whole school communities get the opportunity to explore why Africans remain, in Paul Collier's memorable phrase and stirring book, *The Bottom Billion*.

The embryonic HMC Africa Schools Group meets for the first time at Dulwich on Thursday, 18th March, 2010. If this is the first you have heard of it and you would like to attend, please get in touch, so you can contribute or just find out more. We want to meet, talk, learn – and act.

Dr Gardner Thompson is a quondam Academic Deputy Master of Dulwich College.

HERE & THERE

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Back to school for head boys and girls as Sutton Valence celebrates with flowers



Former head pupils of Sutton Valence School near Maidstone – including 75-year-old Tim Boorer, who was head boy in 1952 – returned to the school in June for the launch of a unique garden, celebrating their achievements over the years.

A *Heads of School Garden* and Pergola has been conceived and created by the Sutton Valence School gardens department, featuring a cottage garden and a walkway lined with ornamental benches, commemorative plaques, and almost 150 species of flowers and shrubs. More than 50 former heads of school have chosen a plant to be included in the garden.

Headmaster Joe Davies, who welcomed 18 former head pupils and their families to the opening ceremony, said: "This is a unique way of celebrating the success of former pupils who became head of school and who contributed so much to school life."

Leavers' ties

James Priory discusses ways to help pupils commemorate and enjoy their last days of schooling



James Priory.

As someone who met his wife at a sixth form leavers' summer barbecue, I am well aware of the significance such rites of passage can have for young people on the cusp of adulthood. My wife and I left Taunton School in July 1991, where Helen had been a pupil since the age of nine and where I had come for the sixth form, having left Birmingham after my GCSEs.

Not that I was on my own in heading from the midlands to the west. Indeed, such has been the migration from God's own city in recent years that the Somerset accent is fast becoming known as the Birmingham burr. Even the classics have been re-packaged: *Farm for the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urbervillas* are now two of the more popular titles on the mobile library circuit.

No sooner did I feel like I had arrived in the landscape of *Cider with Rosie*, however, than I was pulling on my boots to walk out one midsummer morning. Those two sixth form years seemed to pass in the twinkling of an eye – an optical phenomenon which can be difficult to read through the smoke of a leavers' barbecue, but twinkle those eyes certainly did. University beckoned and, in Helen's case, a trip around the world before she would settle back into academic routine.

In our last few weeks at Taunton School, I remember the fun of staging *Cabaret* – our year group's own goodbye to Berlin –

and walks along the banks of the Tone, with the roar of the M5 overhead, as part of a school project to map otters in the area. Every Friday afternoon I used to scour the river for signs of Tarka, attempting to disentangle the sweet odours of otter spraint from the sharp hot stink of mink – less rite of passage than guessing the right passage. These were happy, if curious, days.

The school staged a magnificent Commemoration on the final day of the academic year and the previous night became a temptation for student stunts and japes. I have dim recollections of a 24-hour guard on the hallowed 1st XI square and of trees draped in toilet roll in the early hours of the morning. Later that day, however, an enormous marquee billowed in the breeze and played host to Marmaduke Hussey, then Chairman of the BBC, who presided over our prize-giving, whilst generous bowls of strawberries and cream waited to be served in the Houses.

Looking back – although, just like in *Salad Days*, we said we never would – it feels like a time flowing in milk and honey; a time I feel lucky to have had in common with Helen as our own children now begin to move into their own senior school years. And yet for neither of us, both teaching in our adult lives, has the school bell yet tolled at all.



Launching the leavers.



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BESA



When I became head of sixth form at Portsmouth Grammar School, I was therefore well aware of the responsibility we had to celebrate the ending of our pupils' school careers and the beginning of their adult lives. I understood, too, that there would be official and unofficial celebrations. It was important to make sure that the official one passed muster, both for pupils and their parents.

Most people love a party: the only disagreement can be in the timing. In the age of the American-style High School Prom it is hard to resist the pressure for a large-scale social event to mark the end of Year 11 as well as Year 13. Limousines, with optional fishnet legs protruding from the window, have become an increasingly familiar sight. And in a city of piers and promenades, it is perhaps little surprise that the Year 11 Prom is now a major part of the local summer calendar.

Whilst we celebrate the ending of GCSEs with various events and entertainments, we have been cautious not to dilute the significance of the completion of the sixth form. Our own series of high profile leavers' events is deliberately reserved for those who wait until Year 13 before they even consider donning their fishnets and lowering the limousine window.

Portsmouth has been a city of famously restless childhoods. Charles Dickens was born here and then spirited away by a father in debt; Rudyard Kipling spent unhappy years in the attic of a Southsea residence, sent back to England from Bombay; George Meredith, son of a High Street tailor, later denied that he had even been born in the city, preferring to say that he grew up somewhere near Petersfield.

None of the above benefitted from a PGS education, despite our best efforts to accord them a place in our school archive, although if they had, they might perhaps have felt more enthusiastic about Portsmouth. But teenagers remain restless and that is one of the reasons why we seek to avoid any suggestion of final farewells after GCSEs. Indeed, under one of my predecessors, J C Nicol (1893-1922), the school was concerned that too many pupils were leaving at 16 to become clerks and that not enough were fulfilling their academic potential by staying on into the sixth form.

A century later and in a county where most maintained schools no longer have a sixth form, it is just as important to celebrate the enrichment our school community gains from having such a vibrant sixth form. Our leavers' events, then, are as significant for those who are not leaving as for those who are.

So what do we do at PGS to mark the rite of passage of becoming 18 and the completion of our young people's school careers? For many years we have held a lunch for pupils and parents on the final weekend after A levels, as an opportunity to thank parents for their support and to mark this milestone in their own family's life. IB will give us a new set of dates to consider.

Our Sixth Form Ball has enjoyed the unique setting of an island fort in the middle of the Solent, which had the advantage

of ensuring severely limited opportunities for gate-crashing and the disadvantage of putting everyone into a boat on choppy waters at the end of the evening. In 2009 we opted for the harbour side steadiness of HMS Warrior 1860.

As head of sixth form I was involved in introducing a leavers' service which, for a few years, was held on the night before the Leavers' Lunch – Compline sung, atmospherically, in the roofless nave of the Garrison Chapel in hearing of the shore. The problem with this was that plainsong found itself in competition

with an open air rock concert on the other side of the water in Gosport and those that could hear the responses tended to find the occasion sombre rather than celebratory.

My predecessor, Tim Hands, ever one to innovate, pressed me to design a leavers' tie. I was unconvinced for a while, but in the end we created a silk tie in the school's old, aspirational colours of Oxford and Cambridge blues (so important to J C Nicol) including, as Tim liked to put it, a funeral line of black in acknowledgement of time passing.

The new ties were presented to pupils on their last day before study leave, which encouraged them to wear the ties for their final examinations, boosting morale and pride as they walked tall into the examination hall. The girls received a scarf as well as the tie, and wear them now to Old Portmuthian events in various ingenious ways.

We also took the opportunity to

photograph our sixth form leavers on their final day at school, wearing their ties, for a special Leavers' Book. Each pupil has a dedicated page, and we have a copy bound in leather for pupils to sign their page at the Leavers' Service as a memento of their time at the school. Thanks to this new publication, the archive swells a little more each year.

In 2009 we changed Leavers' Compline to a more upbeat service of celebration in the Cathedral and held it on the same Saturday as the traditional Lunch in a marquee overlooking the Garrison Chapel. It was wonderful to see the entire year represented and to be able to share with their parents the emotion of a day that was both commemoration and commissioning as we sent them out into the wider world.

Many of those young women and men, incredibly, had joined us 14 years ago; some, like me at Taunton, had been with us for only two. And it was one of those who joined us at 16 who expressed most powerfully the feelings of everyone gathered together when she said, "Now is our time, the time to realise ourselves and how amazing we can be. Now is the time to be great, to combine grace, happiness and hard work to accomplish our desires."

For a brief moment I was back in Somerset and talking to someone through a charcoal haze whose name conjured up stories of ancient odysseys and whose face once launched a thousand ships.



James Priory is Headmaster of the Portsmouth Grammar School.



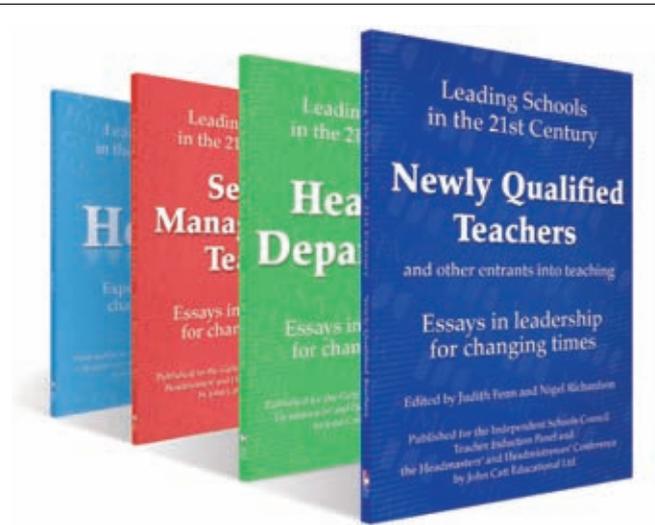
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Fame

From the Bronze Age to Britney

By Tom Payne

Vintage Books, £10.00

978-0-099-51639-2

What would A E Housman – arch-celebrity of the classical world, grand old man and acidic book reviewer – have made of Tom Payne’s *Fame*? And does the recipe work? Payne’s introduction defines content and style: is our obsession with fame anything new? ‘Our fascination with even the most fleeting stars ... bonds us ... and expresses something about how civilisation works.’ (p.2). Noting that the ‘great man’ theory of history is sadly out of fashion, Payne proposes to put the great man and woman back in the spotlight, to explore our relationship with celebrity and compare that relationship with Greek and Roman responses.

There is so much here which works well. Housman would never even have considered such comparisons of merit. One of my colleagues recently scoffed at ‘reception studies’, to which Payne’s study is strongly related, but university courses are giving increasing prominence to how the classical world has influenced us, and rightly so.

After all, Latin literature is in itself virtually a course in reception studies of Greek, and those two civilisations cast a very long shadow over the educational systems of (at least) France, Britain and Germany. Now given the way in which France shaped so much of European thinking in the 18th century, Britain in the 19th, and Germany fatally aspired to do so in the 20th, reception studies do not seem to me to be such a joke. Anyone who doubts the links in this logic should read Guido Knopp’s book *Hitler’s Children*, and its chilling account of the influence of ancient Sparta on the Hitler Youth movement. ‘Dead language’ continues to be a very ironic misnomer.

But if Housman had envisaged a study of *Fame*, it would have been textual criticism; and if some contemporary university academics were on the case, I would anticipate a blow by blow account: chapter one – fame in Homeric Epic; chapter two – fame in Greek Lyric Poetry; all the way down to Michael Jackson-themed-parties (*Sunday Times*, August 2009) and Katie Price’s preposterous breasts (*Sunday Times passim*).

What Payne provides is so much more interesting: it is also looser in conception than reception studies. He dances between

what we describe, somewhat optimistically, as our western civilisations: sacrifice, sport and war, beauty, flawed genius, death, divinity and icons, Christian attitudes, sex, rejection and downfall, partnerships, how celebrities describe themselves and the afterlife of celebrity. There is considerable overlap, but that just makes it wittier.

There are two overwhelming advantages to this approach. The first concerns content. Payne’s light touch enables him to cover a very wide range of material from both ancient and modern world, with a wealth of anecdote and a rare variety of source material. St Augustine would probably be touched to share the spotlight with Rousseau, Lermontov and Michael Barrymore, and the juxtapositions forced me to think much more deeply about our illusions and collusions over celebrity.

The second benefit of Payne’s method concerns style. Dropping the shackles of a rigid chronological survey enables the author to write in a sprightly and engaging way. It is rare that I feel able to recommend books on the classical world to colleagues in the common room, but this book combines readability with deep learning and the light touch of a highly skilled journalist. The last two books that achieved this for me were Mary Beard’s *Pompeii* and Geert Mak’s *In Europe*, so the competition is serious.

Fame is packed with *bon mots*, incisive wit, shrewd judgement and laconic asides. A few straws will show which way the wind blows. On the Olympic boxer Melancomas, who was adept at

Ancient Britney? Cor!



dodging punches until his opponent surrendered out of exhaustion: ‘...he would float like a butterfly without having to sting like a bee’ (p.67). Sometimes an apparently absurd question (‘does anybody know what Kate Winslet actually looks like?’) turns out, with delicious irony, to be downright sensible, not least for viewers of *The Reader* in which her superficial appearance, then her identity and, ultimately, her soul are put to the sternest test. But Payne’s sharpest cuts are reserved for those insights which are embarrassingly close to the knuckle: on our response, for example, to the death of a celebrity:

‘On one level – one sense of dying – we want them to be ours completely, and to know them intimately. On the other, we take some share, and even some satisfaction, in their deaths.’ (p.20)

I have some niggles. Why no index? And more seriously, are the contemporary celebrities chosen by Payne quite on a par with their classical counterparts? It can be embarrassing watching one of our current ‘stars’ trying to fill the boots of, say, Alexander the Great. At times the comparisons seemed too asymmetric to carry complete conviction.

I also struggled with Payne’s tolerant view of the media: ‘the media, they’re us.’ No, they are not. It is now commonplace, but deeply dishonest, for the media to abdicate responsibility for our celebrity culture on the grounds that I read a newspaper, and that in itself creates the culture. If the paparazzi escaped prosecution for the crash which killed Lady Diana, they were extremely lucky that other unresolved questions and a confusion of indecisive evidence snatched the headlines.

And who should take responsibility for the exhibition of Myra Hindley’s face (in the ‘Sensation’ exhibition around the same time) composed of prints of children’s hands? Did they give permission? Nor is it fair to lump print journalism together with the excesses of television and photo-journalism. I would like to have heard a more detailed discussion from Payne on the origins and process of image making in both the ancient and the modern world and the contrasts between them. Although he touches on vase-painting, there was little on sculpture, manipulation of

coinage or the problems of identifying or interpreting propaganda in, say, Augustan poetry.

Conversely, even a psychotic self-publicist like Nero failed to imagine anything quite as appalling as Bazalgette’s television show *Big Brother*. An analysis of the differences as well as the similarities between our cultures, not to mention the motivation of Bazalgette, would have been instructive. Or do I create *Big Brother* by turning on my television? And can I stop it, as some harassed television executives like to claim, simply by turning my television off? Not a definition of ‘reality’ I would confidently run past many philosophers.

As far as literature is concerned, I would like to hear Payne’s view on the prefaces to the works of Sallust and Livy. They suggest to me that Romans, in particular, expected to extract moral lessons from celebrities. Do we do so today? Well yes, but at the other end of the spectrum. More could be said perhaps about the alarming vanity of the letter writers (Pliny?) before Christian values shifted some of our perceptions of ‘pride’.

I would also have enjoyed a nuanced discussion of whether the attitude to fame of a hero such as Aeneas or Achilles alters in the course of an epic. How, for instance, do the Funeral Games of Patroclus in Book 23 of *The Iliad* fit between the death of Hector (Book 22) and the return of his body and funeral in the final Book (24)?

But all that would be another book, or a much heavier one. I was reflecting on *Fame* while visiting Janacek’s house in Brno with my family. Why was I so keen for them to play a few notes on his piano? Did I think something would rub off? Payne’s book provides the clearest account of our strange and vain relationship with fame. Those Heads reading this who are contemplating their school’s projected building programme, in a recession, could do worse than read the chapter on Faust before their next meeting with the school architect or bursar ... and for those colleagues contemplating Headship, I can recommend a close reading of Payne’s discussion of mobs, sacrifice, haircuts and virginity.

William M Duggan is head of classics at Sherborne School.

HERE & THERE

If you have news of topical interest, however brief, for ‘Here and There’, please email it to Dr Stephen Coyne at head.kingsmac@rmpc.co.uk. Items should not exceed 150 words. Good colour photographs are also welcome.



High Flyer Jonty

High flyer Jonty Marshall has an appointment at the Palace after winning a 12 hour flying scholarship from the Air League.

Jonty, who took A levels in mathematics, further mathematics, physics and chemistry in the sixth form of the King’s School in Macclesfield, won the highly rated flying prize after a rigorous examination process at RAF Cranwell.

He has already completed eight hours dual operational flying and four hours solo flying in a Cessna 152 at Wellesbourne Mountford Aerodrome in Stratford and was delighted to meet Air League Patron, Prince Phillip, at a reception at Buckingham Palace in June.

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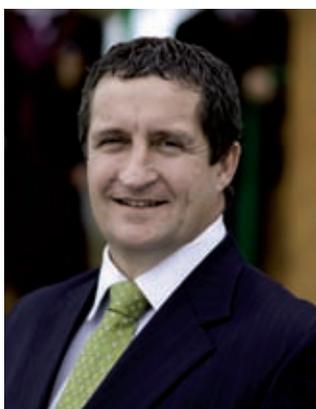
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3. Gluttony and the senior master

At my present school, The King's School in Gloucester, there is no senior master but instead a senior teacher, who doesn't, in fact, seem even remotely senior at all, such is her energy and sheer *joie de vivre*.

However, it has not always been so, at least not in my vagrant career. In my first school, one of the west country's butter-stone monuments, the senior master was definitely one to pour the port into 'portly' and lather the jam onto anything remotely organic passing within, say, a ten metre range.

At my second school, otherwise known as the Jewelled Buckle of the Stockbroker Belt, the senior master was likewise one who measured out his life with coffee spoons, preferably heaped with fine Demerara, and with more than one slice of cake. As for my third school, which liked to think of itself as a Bastion of Presbyterianism in the Frozen Wastes of the North, a big consolation was that the senior master had made a personal enemy of Puritanism and could be relied on to wolf down the haggis with plentiful drams, even if the Principal happened to be eyeing him coldly at the time from his tartan dais.

Picture the stereotype, then, if you will indulge me. It is 5.30pm on a Thursday afternoon and the pupils have trailed away in the twilight. The tea in the urn in the staff room is cold and the jammy dodgers lie in shards and crumbs along the long table. Mrs Cooper, the lady who 'does' for the staff room, has just looked over the threshold and sighed because the only one still there is the senior master, asleep, snoring gently, the marking half done in his lap, his feet propped up on the Wisden *Cricketers' Almanack* for 1947.

It is proving to be another tough week for the senior master and perhaps the toughest thing about it is that he will soon have to wake, shamble out of the building before the caretaker locks up and wend his weary way to his half-derelict cottage stuck between the Abbey and Tesco Express.

It is easy to sneer. However, the truth is that teaching can make gluttons of us all. Can we really get away with sniggering that the senior master ate all the chicken thighs at the Speech Day buffet? Or that the food committee was only convened for his benefit? Or that the bursar is rumoured to include him as a separate line in the budget each time the catering contract is put up for tender?



As I write this, it is Tuesday night and I am standing in front of the fridge. It has been an arduous day, beginning with a tricky disciplinary hearing, continuing with meetings and ending with the Hydra-headed demands of a Parent Evening. Watch me now, then, as I do what I often do, propping the fridge door open, extracting a sliver of ham from its greaseproof paper, wrapping it round a lump of mozzarella and bombarding it with chilli pickle. And, if that isn't quite enough, I will follow it with a crème caramel, a handful of grapes and a glass of red wine, perhaps with just a bit of that cold chop in the corner of the fridge that I almost had yesterday.

Disgusting, isn't it? But the truth is that Gluttony is, well, an occupational hazard and I defy you, as you read this, to deny that you are at least thinking of having a cup of tea and that very last Kit Kat.

Go on – you know you want to.

Alistair Macnaughton is Headmaster of The King's School in Gloucester.

‘In my first school, one of the west country's butter-stone monuments, the senior master was definitely one to pour the port into ‘portly’ and lather the jam onto anything remotely organic passing within, say, a ten metre range.’



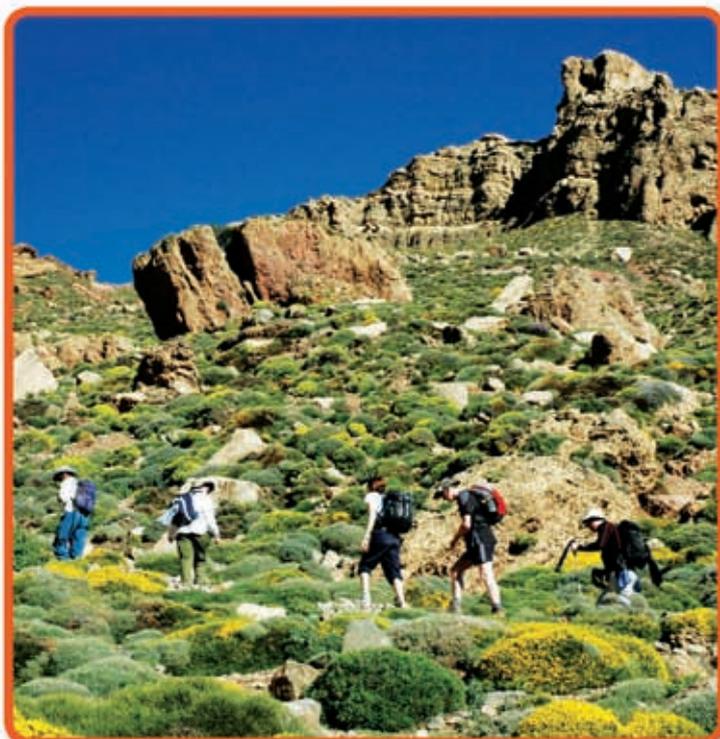
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