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Et Cetera

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Contents

PAGE 3

OFSTED VISIT
Outstanding Ofsted

PAGES 4 and 5

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Oxbridge Challenge
Head to Heads

PAGES 6 and 7

CHOIR PRACTICE
Stile Antico
Sing Choirs of Angels

PAGES 8 and 9

ENGLISH LITERATURE
Lord of the Heath
Storytelling and Fundraising
A Focus on Dickens

PAGES 10 and 11

ART SCHOOL
Nature Morte

Editor's Notes

Cover shot: Celia Birtwell, CBE

HEAD'S INTRODUCTION

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose, so goes the French expression. I read in my newspapers that grammar schools are soon to be back in fashion and in demand. Well perhaps we'll lead the way but in Holland Park fashion we'll be a grammar school for all! Not for a few. Teaching Heads are not back in fashion but they are here and both myself and Mr Chappell are having a wonderful time rediscovering where we began 34 and 25 years ago respectively. As an English teacher I sought out the northern inspiration that is Alan Bennett and Mr Chappell sought out another northern inspiration: Celia Birtwell CBE. One of the unusual things about Celia Birtwell is that she is of the moment. With an illustrious career as a central figure in the world of art, fashion and design, she radiates humility and warmth. She says 'I have always wanted to live in the present or look to the future'. And, here she is, looking forward in 2015 to working with us and our students. I think that Mr Chappell might be prevailed upon to release her from satisfying his own fascination! I am always so humbled when the great and the good want to give us their time, wisdom and expertise. When it comes with the charm, warmth and humility of Celia Birtwell - it is all the better. As ever, it has been a busy term culminating in a stunning Ofsted report which has already brought many plaudits from places on high. We had but begun to digest our success when we were awarded Inclusion Mark with Flagship status. A grammar school for all indeed. At the heart of our success, I would like to think that this lies an abhorrence of complacency. Whatever our successes past, rather like Celia Birtwell, I believe that it is today and tomorrow that will make us continue to be exceptional, unique and even quirky: the bear has been the centre of my Year 13 lessons this term - we love him!

MR COLIN HALL



OFSTED 'OUTSTANDING'

"This is your school. This is an opportunity for you to show the team of inspectors how proud you are to be a part of it. It is your moment to make history." These were the rousing words used by Mr Hall to begin his assemblies to all students, the afternoon before our inspection started. Three days later, it was with joy and celebration that 1,400 students and staff congregated in the school's atrium to hear the news: Ofsted judged the school to be outstanding in every category, effusive about students' behaviour, lavish in their praise of students' achievement and in awe and admiration of the quality of teaching and leadership within the school: "Students' desire for education has no bounds ... Students wholly trust their teachers and their levels of engagement and commitment reflect

a mutual passion for learning and intellectual stretch. "The head teacher is an inspiration for all", "a strong moral and spiritual purpose permeates the school", "outstanding teaching is the norm in this excellent sixth form." And as one of our delighted parents commented, 'Wow!! I felt myself bursting with pride whilst reading the Ofsted report...proud that my son is privileged to attend such an amazing school'. A truly historic moment in our school's history for us all to enjoy and a firm endorsement of our whole school community's drive to excel in all that it does. What everyone can be assured of is that it will not make us bask in glory for very long. Next challenge please!

MR NICHOLAS ROBSON
DEPUTY HEAD

OXBRIDGE CHALLENGE

Celebrating our finest year on record for A2 results, this was a summer to remember for our departing Year 13 students and Oxbridge hopefuls. The list of extraordinary achievements was lengthy. Matilda Wickham successfully secured a place at Queen's College, Cambridge to read Architecture. Dan Kreso with his results took his place at Brasenose College, Oxford to read Physics. We were delighted and have already heard some stories of great successes in their university careers. It is another year for the trials and tribulations of the Oxford and Cambridge interviews. This year, six students have been invited to interview at two of the world's most prestigious universities: Ruby Freeman, Omar Sabbagh, Amelia Edgell-Cole, Violet Smart, James Johnson and Cristina Gomez Gomez de la Torre. Omar Sabbagh, applying to read Law at Cambridge is excited about the interview: "Of course I am nervous! To be asked questions by people at the top of their field is to put one's subject knowledge under the microscope but it should be an exciting challenge and a moment to celebrate the culmination of seven year's hard work at Holland Park." We wish these talented students a most successful year ahead. Opposite is a brief extract from a term time essay on 'Brideshead Revisited' by Amelia Edgell-Cole, taught by Mr Hall.

The novel thus seems to demonstrate an affection for the traditional and a regret for its passing, but there is something deeper than traditional patterns at stake. There appears to be regret that what has been lost is something more haunting: innocence and a world untouched by the tawdry. We see this lament for the loss of innocence portrayed most acutely perhaps in Cordelia. Her childhood vivacity appears curtailed. During her dinner with Charles at the Ritz Grill she recites 'Quomodo sedet sola civitas...', (the first words of the Lamentations of Jeremiah), a lament for the desolation of Jerusalem, with which she draws a parallel to the closure of the chapel. 'Everything has changed so suddenly', says Cordelia, she herself seeming sadder and quieter by comparison with her previous vitality. Her insightful comment 'I sometimes think that when people wanted to hate God they hated mummy' and her realistic view of her late mother – 'She was saintly, but she wasn't a saint' – exhibit a wisdom beyond her age, a loss of innocence, accelerated by the sorrows of her brother and sister. When she says 'I say, do you think I could have another of those scrumptious meringues?' it serves only to emphasise her loss of innocence; her wisdom is somehow innate and rests alongside a youthful exuberance and purity.

MR NICHOLAS ROBSON
DEPUTY HEAD



HEAD TO HEADS



The relentless drive that categorises the school's desire to secure consistently outstanding teaching in all subject areas has continued with rigour this academic year. As part of this focus, teachers have been offered the opportunity to observe the school's leaders teaching in order to arm themselves with strategies and to foster more dialogue about what constitutes outstanding teaching and learning. Mr Hall has led this approach since the beginning of this year, just as he did last year, by teaching a Year 13 English class. Throughout the course of the process every teacher in the school has had the opportunity to observe at least one of these lessons, often accompanied with another member of the Leadership Team to discuss the practice observed. Both teachers and students have been privy to a range of dynamic and creative approaches that have enriched the planning of staff throughout the school: be it the inspirational openings to lessons with powerful music used to stimulate debate or the meticulously marked essays that students have completed on a regular basis. The precision of planning and questioning has similarly been a talking point amongst staff, as has the elevated level of challenge and the probing search for improvement. While teachers have certainly been enriched by this process, the impact on the students

has been even more discernible as they continue their drive to attain A* grades for their English Literature A Level. They have been delighted and stimulated by the lessons, with the level of dialogue often resembling a university seminar rather than an A-Level lesson. Rosie Lloyd Reed was effusive in her comments: "It is not just the wisdom about the literature that Mr Hall bestows upon our A2 English class, but he brings a particular way of studying the text that is both challenging and engaging. The time and effort that he puts into every lesson with Aloysius dressed as Larkin, or Satie's 'Three Gymnopedies' playing as we enter, is unparalleled. I have greatly appreciated being his student this term." The combined impact of student progress and the transferable impact on teaching across school has certainly made this an outstanding vehicle for further school development. What is splendid about having a teaching Head is the sense of camaraderie and sharing that it builds with everyone. I have been part of all lessons and as a teacher with just under a decade behind me it is stunning to see Mr Hall's passion for teaching another twenty five years on from me.

MR JAMES THOM
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

Stile Antico

The Guardian describe them as “impeccably tuned, carefully moulded, beautifully presented”; The Telegraph as “the new kid on the block in the rarefied world of Renaissance choral music”. As one might imagine, it was with great joy that we welcomed four members of the world renowned early music group, Stile Antico, to work with our students for two hours on a Friday afternoon in October. Singing extensively with our school choir across three intensive workshops, they sang both for and with the students, directed them and crafted their sound. As the workshop progressed, the school choir delighted in the tangible steps they took towards the sublime. Engaging in repertoire from William Byrd, Thomas Tallis, Palestrina, John Bennett and Orlando Gibbons, Stile Antico are blending a music from our students which aims to be as beautiful in its performance as in its writing. Techniques for singing legato, for phrasing the music with sensitivity and understanding the context of the text have all enriched the quality of music making amongst our students. Students later put the work from this exceptional

experience into practice, singing for hundreds of devotees and visitors in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris in November. Students filled the Cathedral with the glorious strains of renaissance polyphony, and drew quite a following from a transfixed audience! In addition to singing in the capital’s gothic site of pilgrimage, students also wowed the tourists underneath the Eiffel Tower, in Montmartre and outside the Louvre. Having attracted hundreds of listeners, fascinated to hear an English choir perform the works of their fatherland (and, of course put Holland Park School on the international map), the choir have returned from their choral pilgrimage to further expand their repertoire and prepare for their termly performance in front of the whole school community, Something Spiritual. I am very proud of our choir and it is a pleasure to direct them and watch them develop in confidence.

MR NICHOLAS ROBSON
DEPUTY HEAD



SING CHOIRS OF ANGELS

The internal competition amongst the Leadership Team to produce innovative and thought provoking assemblies is intense. Nerves abound, plans flounder. As some rise to the challenge, others falter! It is all fun but we do take it very seriously because it is our opportunity to assist young people’s spiritual development. I outsourced one of my more recent assemblies! Though I did have to sing a counter tenor solo. I await my colleagues’ response to better that: doubtless, Mr Thom will - talented assembly giver, that Scottish pretender! So, joined by the professional artists, David de Winter and Richard de Winter (brothers), I led an assembly on the brutality of the medieval world. Plunging the whole assembly hall into darkness and relating stories and describing the social structure and physical setting of the era, students had the world illustrated by live music from Guillaume

Dufay and John Plummer. It was an assembly of dark narratives and bleak truths about the medieval world: the hundreds of thousands killed by the black death, the brutal treatment of women, children and animals, the hardship of agricultural toil, the precariousness of life owing to malnutrition and disease. Stories about the cruelty of medieval entertainment emphasised the fact that even in their lightest moments, the Middle Ages were characterised by the harshness of the human condition. In this context the music, sung by candlelight, portrayed a very different theme from the 14th Century: that of the sensitive devotion and meditative reflection of their music. Some of the music from this assembly is available to listen to on the school’s website.

MR NICHOLAS ROBSON
DEPUTY HEAD





LORD OF THE HEATH

'Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along'. The creature was a party of boys, marching approximately in step in two parallel lines and dressed in strangely eccentric clothing.' The Leadership Team sought to enthuse Year Eight students in their study of William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' by hosting 'Lord of the Heath' on Hampstead Heath. Fifteen Year Eight students, who had demonstrated outstanding engagement with the novel, were taken on a mysterious taxi journey to arrive at the Heath. Upon arrival they were provided with a map to lead them through a variety of challenges: discovering the hidden conch and finding pivotal quotations from the novel. The challenge culminated in the students capturing Ms Alexandra Pugh on Primrose Hill, before being rewarded with a Greek banquet of delicious food. As one participant, Luca Settecasi, exclaimed at the end of the event: "Exhausting but utterly enjoyable!"

MR JAMES THOM
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER



STORYTELLING AND FUNDRAISING

Thirty minutes, an image, an opening line, some characters, a range of obscure props: that was all eight teachers and their team of students were provided with to prepare their literary masterpieces for the inaugural 'Storyteller' event. Teachers and their teams had to write and perform short stories to the excited audience of amateur critics and the terrifying panel of formidable judges led by author Leo Benedictus. The team 'Wallace's Wonders', led by Ms Katy Wallace, clinched a deserving victory. The event, importantly, raised money for The Royal Marsden Hospital.

A FOCUS ON DICKENS

Back in May, Mr Hall produced the draft calendar for the next academic year. It all looked very exciting and I gave the go ahead to an array of extra curricular English activities. Wow - it's been exhausting, next year I'll study it harder. We've been to the theatre several times and have held no fewer than twelve events to stimulate an interest in, and love of, literature. All of this before we even begin to launch our 2015 Shakespeare Reinvented - our annual fundraiser for the Royal Marsden Hospital. This year it's our first comedy: 'As You Like It'. It's exactly how I like it: to be beyond busy. As we begin to consider restoration work on the decaying Thorpe Lodge, it seemed an ideal opportunity to use the gloomy, dark and forbidding building, for a winter Dickensian event. 'Dickens in the Lodge'. The school has provided all Year 7, 8 and 9 students with their own copy of 'Great Expectations'. The interactive launch assemblies began with a Year 7 student, Sidney Mcleod, creating his own version of a tentative 'Pip' and Ms Emily Barber in full Miss Havisham wedding dress coupled with authentic cake and cobwebs. Later in the term, the 'Great Readers' event endeavoured to bring the novel to life. Students participated in a mysterious tour of the school guided by costumed characters whose dramatic talents brought energy and delight to Dickens' creations. We closed term on a bleak December evening when students gasped in amazement at Mr Daniel Seed's ruthless portrayal of Magwitch and were moved by the benevolent portrayal of Joe Gargery by Mr Michael Crow. 'Dickens in the Lodge', provided yet another shadowing glimpse, by candlelight, into the world of Dickens. Mr Paul Eakins gave, as Scrooge, a plucked turkey to me (Tiny Thom) as a thank you for my work in bringing Dickens into the twenty first century. The mood was lightened by the accompaniment of baked potatoes, mince pies and other festive treats. This was no Cratchet Christmas!

MR JAMES THOM
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER





NATURE MORTE

Twisting arms is one of Colin Hall's many charms and twist Mr Chappell's arm he did last year and persuaded, cajoled and otherwise talked him into returning to his passion - teaching art. With his work complete and Matilda now firmly ensconced in Cambridge with her A* reading architecture, it was time for him to spread his wings and take on a new challenge. This came in the form of the AS Art group. With the promise of Celia Birtwell - muse of one of his art heroes - David Hockney, he was off. Of course he maintains that no-one truly understands art teaching. Given his other subject is mathematics, he recently invited mathematics colleagues to observe him teach. I spotted, placed on his office shelf, several cards and notes from colleagues who had 'observed' the lesson. The following words, in a card from Frances Hirst, offer an insight to the mystery and wonder that unfolds each lesson, between him and his students, tucked away in some secret room in Thorpe Lodge - access is most certainly by invitation only! *'Thank you for giving me, and the other mathematicians an opportunity to observe your lesson this afternoon. I have to say, I think it was about as far away from teaching as I have ever seen*

- quite extraordinary. I've looked back at my notes and realised that very early on in the lesson I had stopped 'observing' and had started making notes as I might have done had I been a student participating. I can, and will, talk about the level of intellectual challenge, the quality of resources, the opportunity for expression etc. etc. etc. with my team but I am struggling to find the words to adequately describe this afternoon and how it utterly redefined outstanding as extraordinary'. Nature Morte is the current exhibition in our gallery. It features a number of drawings and paintings by Mr Chappell's AS students. They have spent the past eight weeks repeatedly drawing and painting a cardboard box and a skull. I asked him why. 'I wanted the students to understand the importance of the artist's relationship with their subject matter. This can only occur over time. I wanted them to learn to be disciplined and work beyond their natural abilities. I gave them each a cardboard packing box and they spent eight weeks studying it. What resulted was a deeper understanding of 'how to extract 'information' from a subject and translate this into a piece of art. The students are exceptional and I am genuinely excited about what they are yet to achieve'.

MR GREG SMITH
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

EDITOR'S NOTES

SOUND OF SPORT

The Physical Education Team continue to invest much time into their extra-curricular opportunities for students. At the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's mini marathon trials, Emily Surminski finished in 3rd place in the under-13 race while Cassius Rathbone finished an impressive 2nd in the under-17 race. Our under-12 and 14 boys and under-13 girls' table tennis teams were all successful in the Table Tennis School Games, winning in each of these categories without losing a single game. Special mention should go to the under-12 boys' football team, who have started this season with four wins out of four whilst scoring twenty-five goals. A range of Saturday morning activities including swimming, football, netball and lacrosse have provided students with an opportunity to extend their learning and continue to participate in a sport that they are passionate about and enjoy. Mohamed Oulad Laarbi, Year 9, commented "It is brilliant to be able to use the fantastic school facilities at the weekend whilst playing the sport that I love." The swimming pool is now fully operational and all students will have access to this on a half-termly rota through PE lessons plus additional sessions as part of the PE extra-curricular programme.

CHARITY

Several events this term have provided opportunities for us to support local charities. The Storyteller event raised money for The Royal Marsden Hospital and this donation was further supplemented through the proceeds of our school production and annual Staff Winter Lunch. The latter was cooked by our army of in-house chefs, the Leadership Team, who chopped, peeled, sautéed and flambéed their way through some six hours of cooking, providing both a veritable feast for our staff and an important focus on charity. We are working with the Kensington and Chelsea Foundation to support Age UK's Winter Warmth campaign. A series of events have been planned for January, with the support of our Student Leadership Team as organisers, to raise awareness and money including Art Aptitude students designing and making draught excluders to be distributed to elderly local residents.

HPS TRUST

The Holland Park Trust continues to support our students generously through a range of literary, physically challenging and reward activities. The library has received funding to extend its reading clubs and to support our new peer reading mentor programme. Students seeking to obtain the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh Award continue to be assisted as do a range of students participating in additional sessions with fitness trainers in the 300 Club. Students receiving the most Vivo rewards this year will be invited to participate in a Trust funded reward trip to Snowdonia, planned by Mr Greg Smith for the summer term. As always, the school is indebted to such additional opportunities and resources for our students.

A NEW GOVERNOR

We are delighted to introduce and extend a warm welcome to a new school governor, Ms Katy Blackler. Katy is the Headteacher of Avondale Park School and has joined Holland Park's governing body bringing with her significant educational experience and commitment to the very highest standards of teaching and learning. We look forward to her contribution to our school community.

ART ALUMNI

We were excited to receive the news that former student Annette Fernando had most recently won a prestigious Jerwood drawing prize with a piece entitled, 'Wait a minute, it's the truth and the truth hurts XIV', ink on paper. She is now an established artist and has exhibited across the country as well as internationally. Her work is currently exhibited at Jerwood Space in London and La Porte Peinte Centre Pour Les Arts in France. Lucy Letherland, also a former student, has recently been in contact with the school. Lucy graduated as an Illustrator and has worked as an Artist in Residence at the school. She has recently launched a new children's picture book entitled 'Atlas of Adventures'. This is the first of a series of books that Lucy will be publishing. Lucy's work is strongly led by humour and narrative, creating a playful graphic quality.

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