

## Head's Blog – Lent Term 2008

### 17th March

We begin Holy Week knowing that our Easter break starts in this abbreviated week in what already has been a comparatively short term and into which has been packed an enormous amount of activity much of which has been chronicled on the news sections of the website. There will be a distinct change of practice this week with the Headmaster's End of Term Letter appearing in the Home Page News section of the website for the first time. This intention of reducing hardcopy was always one of the guiding factors behind the re-build of the website. Details of the Governors' Meeting, the OW London Dinner, Saturday's OW Spring Gathering, the 2009 School Inspection amongst other matters will be detailed.

Parents' Evenings have always been a key component in our communication with parents in all three parts of the School. This week we meet with those who are due to sit GCSE examinations in May; we are always interested to receive feedback about the format of Parents' Evenings in general and indeed about the frequency and content about our communication with our School community.

We hope that the break is a restful one and you return refreshed for the Cricket and Examination season!

### 10th March

Pupils who had directed their Houses in the recent House Music competition were rewarded last week at the Royal Albert Hall where they enjoyed the wonderful experience of Puccini's Tosca thanks to a benefactor who provided a private box! It would be exciting if more of our pupils could enjoy this immense cultural privilege in the future. Last Thursday was an important day for many S12 and S13 who received their January module results and it is sometimes worth reminding parents whose experience was that of one set of examinations at the end of their Upper Sixth year, that sixth formers today seem to face an incessant stream of examinations.

Recycling initiatives are topical and Hugh Corbett (Fryer's S13) deserves praise for one which he has recently orchestrated in the Senior School and I will report on its success in the coming weeks. I warned readers last week about the power of the new Senior School sound system when they attended the Rock, Pop and Blues Concert last Wednesday; it was certainly worth the clandestine cotton wool that I saw being used! One of the most satisfying features of School life is the support provided by parents at weekly school events as well as annual occasions; we have seen a significant increase in parental attendance in the last three years. It is against this background that there was a disappointingly low attendance at the Friends' AGM last week. The evening was the swansong of committee stalwarts Andy Bigley, Simon Gourlay, David Warwick and Shelley Moxham who have all given of their time selflessly especially for such events as the Summer Ball and Stars in Their Eyes. It was fitting that their last vote was to support a donation of £10,000 towards the purchase of a new School minibus. I am looking forward enormously to working with new Chairperson, Caroline Anstee, in the next 12 months. The Friends of Wellingborough School Summer Ball ticket applications and further details about this year's Summer Ball, to be held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, will be contained within the Easter whole-School mail out. In recent years tickets have sold out very quickly so it goes without saying that your booking form, along with payment, should be received as soon as possible if you require places.

This week we have the Lent Governors' Meeting where, amongst other matters, major budget decisions for 2008-9 are being debated. Having celebrated World Book Day by Assembly readings in the Senior School and a hugely popular character costume day in the Prep this week, National Science Week will witness special activities in normal science lessons based on the theme of Colour Chaos, there is also an inter-house Science Quiz for the Sixth Form on Monday and assemblies on the moon landings on Monday and Tuesday. In this packed week we must also find time to support our pupils in the Annual Wellingborough Music Festival held at Wrenn School, attend Information evenings on the UCAS procedures and also on the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the Annual Old Wellingburian Dinner in London, the OW Day sports fixtures, Wellingborough Singers' Concert and Pre-Prep Spring Fair on Saturday; so a normal Wellingborough week ahead.

### **3rd March**

It is the time of the year in Senior Schools where a tin hat is sometimes a useful accessory and last week we even had a real-life earthquake with which to contend and add to life's trials and tribulations. The disappointments caused by prefect selection, scholarship awards and the nervousness created by Trial examination results which are, by nature, weaker than the final summer results, make for a heady cocktail. The January module results are due to be published as well this coming week.

House Music was won by Weymouth but followed closely by two boys' houses, Garne's and Cripps. The Nevill House Dinner was a great success and again highlights that our young people can enjoy themselves without resorting to the topical binge-drinking. Saturday's hosting of the final round of the Midlands Independent Schools' Cross Country League was a real success and not only did we have individual and team successes ourselves but the organisation of the afternoon itself won deserved praise from all of our visitors. I would like to add my personal thanks to Mrs Hunt in particular and Mr McGuirk, Mr Sandall, Mr Farley, Mr Adams and the CCF personnel who acted as course marshalls.

The Friends organisation plays a widely-recognised role in raising funds through its organisation of the Summer Ball and the Stars in Their Eyes event, producing a Friends magazine as well as supporting the New Parents' Morning. It is holding its AGM this week and I make no secret of my belief that there is a role for an over-arching organisation covering all three parts of the School in addition to a Senior School "parents' group". My hope is that an increased number of parents take up the invitation to attend the AGM and play an even more active role in Senior School community life. The annual Rock, Pop and Blues concert which promotes jointly these genres for both Senior and Prep School pupils is one of those occasions not to be missed, though some earplugs might be a useful accessory!

### **25th February**

Last week's multitude of activities was as eclectic as ever; our active social life included a 007-themed Weymouth House Dinner and a highly entertaining WPSA "Call My Wine Bluff" Evening, Thursday evening's Careers Fair attracted some excellent displays and presentations, Saturday's Open Mornings in the Pre-Prep and Prep Schools were marked by not only a significant number of external visitors but also healthy numbers of visitors from Year 3 in the Pre-Prep tasting what is in store for them in September. The fields and courts on Saturday were again awash with fixtures for both boys and girls of all ages and the continued excellence of Hockey, Football and in particular Netball was much in evidence. The U15 Netball team won the District

Championships last week and they will now represent this District in the County Tournament on Wednesday, 27th February.

The current Prefect Selection process this week sees the completion of interviews and moves from internal to external training. The pupil-driven House Music Competition on Monday is followed by the GCSE Choices Evening for current S9 and their parents on Tuesday, Wednesday's House Evensong, auditions for the 2008 Senior School musical "42nd Street" on Wednesday and Sunday, our first hosting for a number of years of a Cross Country fixture this coming Saturday, Thursday evening's Rotary Public Speaking Area Final for the S9 team and the Nevill House Dinner on Friday evening. The following week amongst other things sees the Rock, Pop and Blues Concert and a lunchtime visit to our good neighbours at Great Houghton Prep School taking some of their "old" boys and girls to show how exciting life has been for them since their move to Wellingborough.

At a time when there is much discussion about cookery and food technology lessons, readers might be interested to read of the initiative which we are developing for S13 pupils who, as part of their enrichment programme, are mastering the delights of survival cooking at university; last week's menu was pasta and pavlova - this week's is a closely-guarded secret!

We continued, this week, our policy of inviting Governors into classrooms to observe and participate in lessons in all three parts of the School; their experience of 48 lessons in the Senior School certainly opened their eyes.

Readers will also be interested to hear of the appointment of Mr David Williams, currently Head of Sixth Form at Reading Blue Coat School, who replaces Mr Ian Hunt from September 2008 as Senior Deputy Head in the Senior School. We also have two new Housemasters in post this half term : Mr Richard Campbell (Fryer's) and Mr Tienie Fourie (Platt's).

### **18th February**

This is a term which is rapidly disappearing before our very eyes. I sincerely trust that you were blessed by the warm sunshine which has prompted snowdrops and daffodils to bloom, some say, unseasonably early. This coming week sees the Pianists' Concert and a Music School Parents' Evening, one of the legendary House Dinners, a Prep School Wine Tasting Evening and a Careers Fair in addition to the hectic weekly routine. On Friday in the Senior School we also host the Governors for their annual "in class" experience where they witness at first hand the trials and tribulations of algebra, chemical formulae, Latin declensions and the legacy of Stalinism in Eastern Europe amongst other testing subjects.

I, myself, will be spending 4 days this week as part of an Independent Schools' Inspectorate team inspecting an independent school in North London. This will provide me with invaluable food for thought as we await to hear of the date of our own inspection which is due in the Lent Term of 2009.

I hope that readers have been able to give some thought to the content of the "Foundations" magazine which was posted during Half term and in which the plans for a new Sports Complex, an Annual Fund and a Bursaries Fund were detailed. We can now only pray for a positive response and support for this initiative.

The annual lengthy Scholarship assessment process is nearing its conclusion following the receipt of Art recommendations from the Art Department. A larger than normal

number of applicants, both internal and external, have been assessed particularly for All-Rounder awards and this has slowed down the process for some. We now begin the arduous assessment of means-tested Bursary applications. Once this whole process has been completed we will be carrying out our annual review of the process, its procedures and the philosophy behind it and we always welcome your own thoughts.

If you do have a gap in your social whirl this Saturday morning you could do much worse than take a walk around both Pre-Prep and Prep Schools for their respective Open Mornings and even better if you bring along and introduce a potential pupil.

#### **4th February**

Having just returned from the Preview Evening of a stunning exhibition of pupils' art work in The Castle and having experienced Sunday's Civic Service with local council representatives including the Mayor and Mayoress and Peter Bone MP, it is not difficult to feel upbeat about School life. If you have the opportunity to visit the gallery space at the theatre please make the effort because you will not be disappointed. A snapshot of the multitude and richness of the experiences open to our pupils can be evidenced by a number of pupils who sang in Chapel Choir at St Albans on Friday evening, ran Cross-Country or played football on Saturday and then sang lustily again at the Sunday service. After a very strong initial field the final round of Deputy Head interviews on Tuesday consists of David Williams from Reading Bluecoat School, Tim Hoyle from Warwick School and Bruce Blyth from Hampton School. As well as presenting and facing interviews with a Governors' panel the three gentlemen will be confronted with a formidable panel of pupils from the School Council and the Prefect body.

This week also sees the launch of the second issue of "Foundations" magazine with its update on development plans and the ways in which the School Community can help us invest in both the present and future education of our deserving young people. In God's own county there is a saying which governs so much of life : " if tha' doesn't ask, tha' doesn't get!". We hope that support, however small and in whatever guise, will enable us to face the challenges ahead.

Finally, one of many pupils who deserves huge praise is William Bigley who has been selected for the England U16 Rugby Squad after an arduous selection process. We wish William luck in the forthcoming international season. He follows in the footsteps of Oli Storey who gained his international cap at this level in 2007.

#### **27th January**

One of the skills which we are perpetually trying to develop in our young people is that of expressing themselves with articulation and confidence. Debating and Public Speaking skills are ones which are encouraged across the age range and we are now, in the Senior School, in the national Rotary Youth Speak season. An excellent District win by the S9 team of Lucy Fellows, Isobel Croft and Rory Bowe speaking on "Over Protection - Precaution or Paranoia?" will, one hopes, be followed by a good showing from the S10 team (Jack Kirby, Jesse Rodgers, Jack Perkins) this Wednesday. The annual Prefect selection process has begun with our S12 pupils making applications within their houses at this stage. First Round Interviews for the Senior School Senior Deputy Headship take place this week.

Last week's House Evensong was well-supported by parents and the congregation (Cripps, Marsh, Platt's and Weymouth) heard of the support for the Claire Rowland

Fund. I would also draw attention to the newly-created pedestrian entrance off Irthlingborough Road which is designed to remove pedestrians from the two vehicular entrances to the site. The minibus service to/from the Station has been a considerable success especially amongst younger pupils and our thanks are due to Jackie Cliffe and Charlie Novell.

20th January

It was dark, damp, muddy and unwelcoming but Saturday was evidence once again of why one of the features of their school days to which OWs regularly refer and which often is missing for them, is the sense of community which they recall from school ; at Abington Park for the County Cross Country Championships where the level of parental support was exceptional and at Uppingham, Bloxham and Wellingborough on Saturday afternoon the touchlines were packed with the vociferous, voluble support which is so appreciated by players and coaches alike. Thankfully it is never destructive and long may those noisy mums continue their support ! The successes of the girls' netball teams in particular, were due, in no small part, to this encouragement.

May I take the opportunity of reminding the whole community about our zero tolerance towards irresponsible driving? This Victorian site is difficult enough to negotiate without irresponsible drivers. If you do see an incident we would appreciate knowing about it and we have evidence to show that we will not sweep it under the carpet. Our interest is one of safety above all else.

In this week, which I am led to believe is the most depressing of the year (where do these psychologists trawl up this nonsense?), you will see plenty about which to smile in School including a Tudor Day for P7. We begin our annual Prefect Selection process and there is ample leadership potential from within S12, we are planning for both the Art Exhibition and the Spring Concert at The Castle in the coming weeks and we would urge you to write these into your diary now along with this week's House Evensong for Cripps', Platt's, Marsh and Weymouth as well as the Civic Service on Sunday February 3rd. We have no time for depression.

13th January

This coming week sees the introduction of a completely revamped Saturday activities arrangement in the Prep School driven by Enterprise Manager Jackie Cliffe. It is also the second week of the popular Monday evening song and dance workshops run by Kerry Grimes and Ian Riley which this term are based on the "We Will Rock You" musical. Following marking of 13+ and 16+ papers I will this week be involved in the interviewing of the leading academic scholarship candidates. As I commented last week both on paper and at interview one is seeking evidence of excellence and a curiosity which goes far beyond simply being good at a subject. This also of course applies to the assessment of Music, Drama, Art and Sport scholarships and awards. I look forward to attending Wednesday's Young Enterprise Business Lunch which focusses on a Marketing presentation by Simon Knibbs of "Iceberg Marketing". A seminal moment will be reached on Tuesday evening when the S13 Parents' Evening will be the very last such occasion for those without younger children. On this very theme it is always of interest to receive feedback from you about the nature and format of our Parents' Evenings.

Following an idea put to me by e-mail we are making progress on planning for a social lunch specifically for grandparents.

The most heartfelt of praise this term to date is due to Ayo Ajanaku who has been offered a place to read Medicine at Oxford. Congratulations to all of the presenters at last Friday's CCF Presentation Evening for the new S9 recruits. Accolades heaped upon the girls' 1st XI football side following last Saturday's "demolition" , 10-2, of Oakham were well-founded. Best wishes are extended to the large number of pupils who this Saturday will be braving the mud whilst representing the area in the County Schools' Cross-Country Championships at Abington Park, Northampton.

7th January

To all parents, pupils, colleagues and friends of the School I wish you a very successful New Year! I would ask that your own good wishes go in part to our AS and A2 pupils; for those of us who studied in a different era spare a thought for the large number of 6th formers who face January modules over the next three weeks and whose festive season was blighted by revision. In addition to Public Examinations this month sees the annual 11+, 13+ and 16+ Scholarship examinations and impending practical Music, Performing Arts, Art and Sport assessments. One of the most difficult tasks is, after extensive deliberations, to reach fair conclusions over awards and scholarships and the dispensing of bursaries. These decisions will be made to reward "scholarly excellence" and not simply to reflect those who are "good".

This coming week also sees the induction of the whole of S9 into the CCF including a Parents' Presentation Evening on Friday 11th January. The tradition of an active, adventurous CCF is one of which we are rightly proud and that experience will continue to be a key compulsory component of the opportunities open to every pupil for at least the next 18 months of their school career.