

Head's Blog – Michaelmas Term 2009

Monday 7th September

I know that many parents are delighted to have their offspring off-loaded onto us and let me tell you that most offspring are delighted to be back amongst their friends and out of their parents' hair! Whether we can translate that love of School into a productive term is our annual challenge. The new School year has indeed begun with overt optimism and cheerful dispositions despite the effects of the Admin flood, the Borough Council's planning decision and a major electrical fault which beset the Prep School as late as Friday evening. We will keep parents updated on the news page and this blog as to progress which we are making in handling what fate has thrown at us.

Teachers have completed two days of In-service training and amongst an interesting range of presentations and workshops was a session on Teenage Mental Health. One element in this was the impact of a culture of recreational drugs and alcohol on our sons and daughters. When we are all-too-often guilty of placing high academic expectations upon their shoulders it is intriguing to see the possible effect of unrealistic expectations coupled with the lasting effects of binge drinking and so-called "party drugs" (cannabis in particular) upon both the wellbeing and the academic progress of teenagers. Our plan is to follow up last year's Johnnie Leach presentations with further opportunities for broadening our understanding this academic year. We, from time to time and like every other school in the country, hear anecdotal evidence of pupils' involvement in recreational drug-taking out of School. I would ask that, although this may be outside of school hours, we are informed and we are helped to confront what can have damaging effects, both long and short-term, upon our young people.

The summer holidays saw numerous successes for our pupils : the sports tour to New Zealand and the Cook Islands was an unforgettable experience, the Year 7s, as ever, enjoyed the challenge of the Ardeche trip, numerous summer and pre-season camps were held, the Senior Hockey girls won their Tournament at Rugby School against strong opposition, the Pringle Trophy Team have been involved in arduous preparation with Lt Col. Steve Bruce, many members of the CCF have been involved in summer camps and three Year 8 boys, under the guidance of the DT department, became National winners of a Young Engineers' Competition. My particular thanks go to the teachers who supported all of these opportunities during their summer break.

The School Roll is thankfully healthy in both Prep and Pre-Prep Schools and in the Senior School we have today welcomed 11 new pupils into S9, three into S10, 7 into the Sixth Form including Patricia Damm from Germany and three Chinese pupils who are living with guardians. This follows a number of successful examples of pupils from overseas having joined us for short periods in the last few years and we are firmly of the belief that the cultural experience for both our pupils and our visitors is invaluable and to be encouraged.

The new School Shop has enjoyed an excellent few weeks of trading and we will provide an update shortly as to future plans in this direction.

Details of our Examination results are detailed on the News pages and these will be updated as we receive the outcomes of re-marks of which there have been a number already.

An occasion to which we always look forward is the New Pupils' and Parents' Service this coming Sunday morning when families are welcomed and hear experiences of the first week from newcomers alongside words from more experienced members of the School community; it is a fun event. A little further on in the term the S9 have their Battlefields Trip to experience and the exacting rehearsal schedule for this year's production in The Castle theatre, "As You Like It", has begun already.

Monday 14th September

The sun has finally decided to come out, school uniforms and suits are just about retaining their newness but it would have been naive to believe that all of the carparking problems had been solved; the "Men in Green jackets" tell me that the "Drop-Off Zone" is a complete misnomer and some drivers of large cars retain a belief that its purpose is as an "Abandoned Zone". Until we end this practice we will continue to have short tempers caused by the blocking-in of cars.

Kylie Loak-Chrisp received official recognition that she has passed her NQT Induction year, Alex Blagoev has become a grandfather. I met with the new Young Enterprise advisors for a briefing and to express our sincere thanks for the invaluable support which they will provide. The New Pupils' and Parents' Service is such an enjoyable gathering because there is an acute "feelgood" air to the occasion and this Sunday was no exception. The week also brought the start of competitive fixtures for rugby and hockey teams and an incredibly demanding rehearsal schedule for "As You Like It" which opens in under four weeks' time.

The Cripps' Family Fun afternoon at Cransley Hall inspired the boys in the House to excel in organising a variety of non-olympic sports such as "blindfold tin alley", "hit the crossbar", "welly-hoying" and the timeless tug-of-war. Sustenance in the form of mums' homemade cakes added to the occasion which raised £840 towards the Alzheimer's Society and the Sahara Fund.

We are about to launch this year's lunchtime Enrichment programme, details of which will appear on the Website. Looking ahead to next week we also have one of the highlights of the calendar : the highly competitive House Singing Competition which takes place in the Dining Hall on Wednesday afternoon; the Coffee Shop will this year be closed during the afternoon because last year we remained open and the noise proved off-putting whilst pupils were singing. A Careers Fair (Thursday Sept. 24th 7.00pm - 9.00pm in the School Hall) has been organized to which pupils and parents from across the whole School are invited. The Harvest Festival Service takes place on Sunday 27th September.

A reminder will be issued to all Senior School pupils regarding Friday afternoons and the requirement for a commitment from all for the entirety; S9 will be involved in PSHCE until January, CCF is compulsory for S10, S11 will be either in CCF or DoE, sixth form will be involved in any of the above or an organised community service programme.

Parties on school days and Fridays during term time inevitably have an impact upon learning and Saturday sporting commitments. We would respectfully ask that these social events are not encouraged by parents during the school week.

Monday 21st September

I greatly enjoyed my Saturday afternoon witnessing a promising U13 girls' Hockey victory at Kimbolton (5-0) followed by one of the best collective displays of Rugby from the senior boys witnessed for some time in their three wins against King Henry VIII, Coventry. The junior teams playing away from home also covered themselves in glory. The post-match refreshments, now in the Coffee Shop, were well-received by parents and visitors alike.

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Filming is taking place this week for the promotional DVD which will be available on the website, the incomparable House Singing competition is fast-approaching on Wednesday with sounds currently wafting through Houses' closed doors. We are often asked about what more parents can do to support their sons/daughters and the Presentation this Wednesday by Frances Ward to parents of Years 7-11 on Consolidating Learning Styles in the SS Hall contains some exciting ideas, The Careers Fair organised by Mr Moss, Head of Careers, for parents and pupils of all ages will likewise hopefully provide food for future thought.

My current week also includes a WSSPA (formerly "Friends") meeting discussing funding allocations for this year following the successful Summer Ball. We have proposed, to the Committee, projects ranging from ICT software and hardware, new gym equipment, funding for a school garden to augment the Gardening Enrichment activity, storage facilities for musical instruments and recycling initiatives. Although fundraising and social events are the prime reason for this body at each meeting I ask for views on matters of general school interest. This is not an opportunity to lambaste particular teachers but rather to share ideas and views. My Tuesday evening also involves a Governors' Education Committee Meeting during which we will be assessing the GCSE, AS and A2 results and the strategies for improving our results further still.

Sunday's Harvest Festival will require the attendance of S10 pupils and I would urge, as a matter of courtesy and protocol that as this is the only Sunday service where this year group's attendance is

compulsory, we receive clear advanced notice from parents if a family occasion prevents a pupil from being with us.

As England finally contrived a victory in a largely-forgotten one-day series we would rather focus on Harriet Leach's forthcoming visit to Australia as captain of the England U19 Women's Indoor Squad. Harriet will be presenting assemblies on her unprecedented achievement and her preparation for this tour.

This term's Lunchtime Enrichment "booklet" is now available on the School website. This allows parents a chance to discuss choices with the pupils. It is located at Senior School/Co-Curricular and Trips/Enrichment Programme/Michaelmas 2009. It is a hefty document and a bit of patience is required to open it, and the format differs slightly depending on your Adobe Acrobat! Pupils are required to make their choices by Thursday 8 October.

And finally a plug for "MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING" this coming Friday from Ruth : "As in previous years we will be serving bacon rolls and croissants in the Quad from 7.30am. The Coffee Morning will follow in the Senior School Hall from 10am to 12noon. Any donations of home baking for the cake stall and raffle prizes would be gratefully accepted. Please come and join us and support the Macmillan Breakfast and help to make it another successful event."

Monday 28th September

Our roving camera crew from DSD who are putting together our new dvd have been suitably impressed by School life in the last week. House Singing with its inevitable controversial judgement, was a pleasure to behold (the Facebook entry tells the tale); the standard was higher than ever especially with Parker-Steyne's maintaining its impressive recent mellow tones but being matched by a tuneful Fryer's in particular of the boys' houses. One of my high points was The Platt's Band accompanying their interpretation of "A Little Help From My Friends" but Weymouth, orchestrated as ever by Lauren Hoyle, came out as winners. Not wishing at all to be provocative but one wonders if boys are at a natural disadvantage and will never win?

We have in recent years taken Macmillan Cancer to our hearts and have participated in Macmillan's Big Breakfast and World's Biggest Coffee Morning. Both events attracted even more support than last year's record-breaking efforts; Prep School children were able to buy cakes generously donated by parents during the morning break raising £136.42 in 15 minutes. The £2700 raised from 7 a.m. – lunchtime in the Senior School Quad and Hall was augmented by a generous donation of £500 from BI Electronics (a company with an OW connection). The community spirit displayed by friends, parents and pupils alike warmed the heart as did the Harvest Festival Service which included the regular visit of Sheila Addison and Sonny from the orphanage in Nepal

A very well-attended presentation "Consolidating Learning : What Can Parents Do To Help?" was held by the Learning Support Department and fronted by Frances Ward. Topics covered included memory and revision, learning styles, study skills, organisation and time management and how to help with homework. We are planning a follow-up evening session in the New Year.

The WSSPA (formerly "Friends") is a vehicle for supporting and promoting the School. At this week's meeting the Committee under Caroline Anstee agreed to funds, including those profits from The Summer Ball, being allocated to new Gymnasium Equipment, new Water Fountains, recycling initiatives and Information Evenings particularly on contentious issues such as Drugs and Alcohol awareness. I also believe that the Committee should be a sounding board for parental views on School life in general and comments were sought and offered on After School provision, communication techniques from School, party culture, bus routes and the School Shop. It is worth commenting upon the feedback which I have received on concerns which I voiced about the apparent ease with which our young people get hold of alcohol and the belief that parents must take responsibility for parties where alcohol and its often uncontrolled use, is freely available and often abused. Many of you parents are concerned and I urge you to act.

Interestingly all of the Club Presidents and Housemasters/mistresses took part this week in a 6 hour in-service training conducted by Jackie Cox, with whom we have worked previously, on "teenage issues" including drinking, drugs, body image, self-harm, bullying. The theme of trying to promote self-esteem against the background of weighty expectation and pressures proved a fascinating subject area from which we all benefited.

With two weeks of rehearsals remaining tempers shorten and tensions mount for the cast and director of "As You Like It" but the standard is improving to the extent where I urge you to buy your tickets now! Sport continues to play a central role in life across the School; last weekend saw a mixture of good and indifferent rugby and hockey results as well as a worthy 3rd place in the National Fell Running Championships up and down mountains at Sedbergh in Cumbria. However, this weekend I shall forego my rugby refereeing and hockey-watching for a visit to Lymstone in Dorset for the annual Pringle Trophy national competition for schools' Royal Marines sections.

Next Saturday, 3rd October, is our Open Morning and an opportunity for those considering sending their children to the Prep School and Pre-Prep, to have a guided tour. If you know of anyone who may be interested, please encourage them. That is equally the case with the 6th Form because we have our A Level Choices Evening on December 1st and we would also ask that you encourage your friends to consider us and at least come and look around.

Monday, 5th October

The S9 Parents' Evening will be an opportunity to communicate with parents after pupils have completed their first month in the Senior School; although I shall be in Liverpool I know that the Senior Deputy Head, David Williams and indeed all of my colleagues, will emphasise that the year group as a whole has settled-in well; I have received very positive feedback from the ever-popular Battlefields Trip staff. However, one is ever-wary of complacency, and there will be a reminder both to pupils and parents that the Michaelmas Term can be a long haul over the coming weeks and inevitably problems will arise; communication between home and School becomes even more vital. "The Guide to The School" is a source rich in information which should inform parents of many of our procedures which are sometimes lost in the morass of information which we are asked to assimilate and digest. If there are changes to any of these details we will publicise these on the website. The Bursar will shortly be writing to every family regarding our further moves to electronic communication.

The whole of the CCF was involved in Field Day exercises and the Duke of Edinburgh teams were undergoing their own practice expeditions. It is worth reminding pupils and parents that we have a comprehensive OOSV policy and set of procedures to which we must all adhere. The Royal Marines' Section has made great strides in the last few months under Lt Col. Steve Bruce and Head of Section Mat Palmer. This weekend the team competed in the annual Pringle Trophy just outside of Lymstone in Devon. It was a real privilege to see their efforts on Saturday. The team managed to achieve a position of 5th out of 18 schools' Royal Marines' sections for their highest ever placing beating amongst others Harrow, Uppingham, Rugby and Bedford Modern.

Saturday morning saw Open Days for both the Pre-Prep and Prep Schools and I am delighted once again to report healthy attendance from prospective parents and this was particularly the case in the Prep School where 71 families, the highest ever, visited; five years ago there were 14 people in total and some of them were from the same family!

We will be advertising a forthcoming Scholarship Information Evening (Monday 23rd November) and the 6th Form A level Choices Evening (Tuesday 1st December). We are acutely aware of the fact that our parents and pupils are our best advertisements for prospective parents and pupils and we would urge you to encourage friends, neighbours, colleagues to consider coming along to visit us on such occasions.

It is the time of term where teenagers are apt to allow standards to slip and a cautionary word that some standards of appearance are showing signs of wear and tear or just plain casualness. We are determined to deal with this and would ask for parental support in reinforcing this whether before a pupil leaves the house or steps from the car in a morning.

Monday 12th October

The richness and variety of Headmastering was no more vividly highlighted than in the last seven days. For many, a few days away from the workplace is a time for rest and relaxation. A break in Liverpool followed by 24 hours staying in its arch-rival Manchester, did not distance me too far from Wellingborough particularly with my newly-acquired dongle enabling me to pick up my 120 e-mails (though all around me seemed to be "attached" to their blackberries). They did not need to hang out of a window to pick up a signal.

This was the week when schools are meant to run, for once, like clockwork but David Williams bombarded me with a series of matters requiring instant resolution. The annual HMC Conference itself attracted media attention for the presence of Dame Suzi Leather from the Charity Commission because she and we debated the controversial policy on Charitable Benefit. Alongside the many interesting seminars headed by academics my own favourite was the poetry session led by Roger McGough and not just because it reminded me of "Lily the Pink". Later in the week a fascinating course at Granada TV Studios during which my techniques in handling TV and radio interviews were scrutinized with a fine toothcomb was both stimulating and testing. I heard the phrase "standing on the shoulders of greatness" during the week and it was neither at the Headmasters' Conference nor at the decaying splendour of the studios when surrounded by the current cast of "Corrie" or photographs of their predecessors "Albert Tatlock", "Ena Sharples", "Bet Lynch" et al; it was on Sunday morning in Chapel at the Service to dedicate the memorial to Group Captain J.B.Tait the OW who led 617 Squadron, Bomber Command, during W.W.II. The tributes by Squadron Leader Tony Iveson and the RAF Chaplain-in-Chief, the Venerable R.Pentland had a humbling effect and also reminded one of the sacrifices which our servicemen and women. We have received numerous thanks from members of the OW community who knew Willy Tait in his school days here before the Second World War. Debbie Whittemore deserves enormous praise for the typical thoroughness which she put into preparations for this memorable occasion.

Saturday was a good sporting day for the 1st XI Hockey side who enjoyed a deserved 3-0 win against Stowe, the U14 Hockey XI, U15 and 16 XVs covered themselves in glory in a manner not matched by the two U14 XVs who rather capitulated to stronger MCS Oxford sides.

"As You Like It" rehearsals have been progressing well, the minimalist but effective set is complete, costumes have received last-minute alterations and now we await the performances at The Castle. I wish the cast an enjoyable week treading the boards and hope that they are supported by audiences for whom Shakespeare is brought alive.

This last week before Half Term is traditionally one where UCAS applications forms for those applying to Oxbridge and Durham courses as well as Medicine, Vet Science and Dentistry are often rushed to beat the deadline. There is little doubt that the next five working days will be business as usual when dealing with teenagers meeting deadlines. I have been delighted to learn this week of the work of Wellingborough Youth Forum members Charlotte Bull and Holly Price, both sixth formers, who are working together with other young people in the area to develop ideas and suggestions to improve Wellingborough town centre and come up with new activities for young people. To date they have helped set up a table tennis club in the local Hindu centre, run a fashion show with a focus on healthy modelling, and are distributing a budget of £40,000 to worthwhile causes. They are also looking at funding a motorcross centre, as well as a cinema in the town centre. This Friday they are meeting with the Mayor of Wellingborough for a 'Democracy Day' and are attending a residential course over half term. They are proving to be superb ambassadors for both School and the local community.

My forthcoming week will be dominated by the annual HMC Conference, this year held in Liverpool, where the Headmasters/Mistresses of the UK's "leading" 250 independent schools gather; this is an event which invariably attracts media attention. Already the focus in the Sunday papers has been upon manner in which our schools are withstanding the economic recession and the summer's AS results with a suggestion that the latter have been deliberately manipulated in such a way as to ensure that high grades are reduced. This year the pre-planned themes running through the conference will be examination standards, the decline in Science education, what business wants from the education system, the role of universities in the 21st century and the Charities Commission and Public Benefit.

Following some of my recent Blog comments I will also be interested in attending sessions on Drug and Alcohol Addiction and Cyber Bullying. I commented 12 months ago that a similar seminar highlighted the manner in which one needs, as either parent or teacher, to be ever-vigilant and aware of the latest trends in technology. Are we keeping pace with our sons' and daughters' use of mobile phones, i-pods, social networking sites and the internet generally? Again this week I hear of texting in the middle of the night. I will never lose sight of the fact that we, in school, cannot work independently. My eye was also caught by two other seminars : one entitled "Dealing with Challenging Parents", the other "Why Stupidity Should be Taught in Schools" !

Finally with justifiable praise being heaped onto the efforts and behaviour of all of those involved in the multitude of activities during the last few days, although it was largely a sport-free weekend ,we did play one hockey fixture; the 1st XI drew 1-1 v Wisbech with Lucy Henson scoring with the last hit of

the game – the best goal of the season so far with a reverse stick into the top corner! She told me this morning that she had tried it many times before and it had never worked : perseverance!

Monday 2nd November

Those of us fortunate enough to have enjoyed a distant two-week Half Term break I am sure count ourselves lucky but the rude awakening of the end of British Summer Time hits hard. I extend my gratitude to my colleagues and praise to the participants on school-organised Half Term activities; as a Headmaster it is a source of immense pride when receiving reports of praise from members of the public for our pupils and this was the case on the RAF Gliding Course, Rome and Pompeii Study Trip and Royal Marines Camp at H.M.S. Raleigh.

During Half Term work on the new bell system has moved closer to completion and from Tuesday we will run a trial for daily bells designed to mark the end of lessons and breaks; one hopes that this will remove the inevitable excuses for lateness. The two pillars which have appeared on the Main Entrance are the first steps in the construction of Entrance Gates which will secure the site from Irthingborough Road and will be complemented by gates on the Prep School Drive Exit. These have been paid for through the generosity of the OW Club.

The week before Half Term saw the culmination of the run of “As You Like It” and Chris Martin-Sims’ review under the Drama Section on the website captures both the impressive production and the sensitive interpretation of Shakespeare achieved by all of the cast. The closing night was a particularly poignant evening for Rebecca Redden, Matthew Fellows, Howard Barnhurst, Cameron Ellson, Lottie Fordyce and Holly Price all of whom were appearing for the final time in a school production.

Remembrance Sunday in Chapel is always a special occasion with the combined presence of OWs, parents, friends and each section of the CCF. The Service itself, the singing of the Chapel Choir and the respect shown by our young people for the history of our School never fails to provide for a moving occasion and sense of community. On Saturday evening we welcome the OWs for their November Dinner under the baton of Graham Garrett the OW President and Headmaster 1973-93. Long may the relationship between School and Old Wellingburians of all ages remain strong!

The lunchtime Enrichment programme, in its second year under Allen Ramsden’s leadership gets underway this coming week. We have made some modifications as a result of pupil feedback and the programme is certainly an eclectic mix.

The respite enjoyed over Half Term was merely temporary as we plan ahead for forthcoming dates for the busy calendar the Scholarship Information Evening on Monday 23rd November, “Stars in Their Eyes” on Friday 27th and the A Level Choices Evening for all S11 and potential external applicants on Tuesday 1st December.

Monday 9th November

It is a great pity that we could not “bottle” last weekend as it captured perfectly the varied life of the School. On Friday the Astro and Floodlit pitch were awash with parents, U13 female hockey players and U11 rugby players on a damp and blustery evening. The attraction of the new wood-burning stove in the Tea Pavilion was too much for some to resist but the victory by the girls’ A VII during which they drew with Stamford and defeated Spratton, Bedford HS and a very strong Gresham’s side, warmed home supporters. The PS staff were helped out by SS PE staff and much credit must go to Claire Mitchell’s organization including the production of our new leaflets for Scholarships and Bursaries which were available for the first time. The evening took a different twist as later Cripps’ House boys organized a well-attended S9 Halloween Disco, in aid of the Morocco Trip, complete with thumping rhythms, apple-bobbing, skeletons and ghouls. Saturday with its multitude of hockey and rugby fixtures from early in the morning until late afternoon was a typically busy day. In addition, the OW soccer XI played in the Arthur Dunn Cup competition at home to the old boys of Ampleforth. It was a pleasure to welcome back a squad which comprised almost entirely of those who had left in the last five years. Their 3-0 victory with ex- Parker-Steyne’s striker and renowned singer, Jordan McGuire, scoring a superb hat-trick, was well-deserved. We look forward to the next round in December. The OW Dinner on Saturday evening is always an occasion where one welcomes back a predominantly older generation but one which enjoys itself all the same; the characteristic audience participation once Graham Garrett took to the piano was more entertaining than some of the X Factor acts!

Remembrance Sunday itself, one the highlights of the annual School calendar, was both a moving and superbly-planned service. The poignancy of the occasion was not lost on the congregation as a number of OWs are currently on active service in Helmand province and we were surrounded in Chapel by numerous reminders of OWs who lost their lives in previous conflicts. The CCF and the Chapel Choir played their parts memorably and the Chaplain's address urging us to pay attention to the views of our brave soldiers in Afghanistan perhaps more so than the armchair and political observers back home, was well-received. It is interesting then to hear that the cause which the newly elected PS Charity Committee has decided it should support this coming year in 'Help for Heroes'

During this coming week a military theme is continued with the S10/11 GCSE drama groups having been chosen to perform in a special WWII production at The Castle Theatre on Wednesday and Thursday evenings.

We are very excited about our developing Eco-Status application with the Action Team having its first meeting on Tuesday. We are embarking on "Switch-Off Week" across all three parts of the School and promoting the idea of switching off radiators in rooms when not required, shutting doors, windows and turning off lights and PCs when not needed. The "energy police" will be watching and monitoring us all!

Despite fatigue and injury bedeviling our teams sporting contests are incessant and this week sees the challenge for both the U15 and 1st XV of the next round in the Daily Mail national competition. We wish them, and the U14 girls playing in this week's County Netball finals, well.

Monday 16th November

Moroccan food could never have tasted so good; the Cripps' boys and Mr Houghton served up a veritable feast of seafood fishcakes, herb-crusting rump of Lamb, couscous and lemon parfait for parents at their Sahara Banquet in aid of next February's trekking to the Atlas Mountains; the Alzheimer's Society also benefits from all of their fundraising. However, the lifeskill of preparing food for such a discerning clientele will, one hopes, encourage the boys to develop further their culinary skills in the future. Our only complaint was that size 6 font on a Menu is useless for those of us without our reading glasses!

As ever, sport's presence was felt this last week; we wish Jack Johnson a speedy recovery from his knee ligament injury at Bloxham on Saturday; of those sides appearing in national competitions the U14 Netball girls won deservedly their County tournament and the U15 Rugby squad progression to the last 32 of the Daily Mail Competition is a superb achievement when one considers the numerical year group superiority which most of our opponents enjoy. Saturday's rugby and hockey-watchers certainly chose the right option rather than watching turgid international rugby on television. Next Saturday afternoon we are inviting parents, warmed by the new wood-burning stove, to post-match drinks which will be available 3.30 - 4.30pm in the Tea Pavilion. On Sunday lunchtime the cross-country runners hosted Richard McGuirk and some of his boys from Rugby School as well as a collection of OWs and staff for the McGuirk Trophy's two laps of the fields. The only glitch in the event was the fact that the organisers had not borne in mind that the Embankment Golf Club might not have completed their weekly Sunday morning round! Cross-Country is testing enough without having to run the gauntlet of golfers whose concentration was obviously unsettled by a crocodile of mud-splattered, sweating runners!

We this week welcome back Mr Chris Scott to the Science Department following his recent enforced absence after his knee operation and we are delighted to have Charles Woodruff remaining with us for the remainder of this term. We have interviews on Thursday and Friday for the Head of Art position ahead of John Dutfield's retirement next summer and next week we interview for Mike Nugent's Head of Modern Foreign Languages post. Both gentlemen step down after many years of loyal service and I am sure that deserved accolades will be dispensed in due course. The most recent communiqué from the Foundation ought to have reached parents with its update on the progress made particularly under the guidance of Director Martin Minshall and I would urge you to support in whatever way you are able. The Eco-Team, with its efforts to conserve energy across the School through the "Switch Off" initiative, has begun well. Following last week's Charity Election the Claire Rowland Fund will be our next charity beneficiary. The pupils who won the Rotary National Public Speaking Competition earlier this year, Helen Gent, Alice Gividen and Helen Amos, were invited last Saturday to speak at the Rotary Institute Conference. They were the only youngsters there and all three were mature and polished particularly as it was a national event, and once again they were fantastic ambassadors for the school.

Finally this week sees an S12 Parents' Evening and Mrs Barnhurst and I will remind parents of the need for pupils to not allow AS matters to slip and will also mention the undoubted impact which social life and party excesses have upon academic success.

Monday 23rd November

This week we are caught in the "no-man's land" between Half Term and Christmas; it is a time when the popular two-week break has been lost in the memory and the long-awaited Christmas holiday is a month away. Internal examinations and assessments abound, nights become darker and teachers traditionally plunge into the depths of despair under the heavy yoke. There are, however, moments to brighten up dark days : a damp, grey Saturday afternoon was warmed by a convivial atmosphere in the Tea Pavilion, a heartening attendance at this evening's Scholarship Information Evening brought double the numbers achieved last year, the Eco-warriors have continued their vigorous crusade, the forthcoming academic Masterclass in the Prep School on Saturday morning has attracted almost 50 pupils from local primary schools and Friday's acts in the Stars in Their Eyes evening have been practising behind closed doors in anticipation of demonstrating more talent than "Jedward"!

Although apparently a long way off, we have arranged a political debate in school in March with each of the three leading political parties participating in a live debate. We are also finalizing arrangements for the Trinity Term but Prizegiving on Thursday June 24th and the Summer Ball on Saturday 26th June should be written into diaries without fail.

This week the U13 and U14 girls' Hockey XIs and the U15 XV are all appearing in national competitions and deserve our enthusiastic support. Although there were many worthy results last week it is worth specific reference to the U14 B XV victory not only because against all the odds they conjured up an unlikely victory but they achieved it despite numerous late withdrawals. I received an anonymous e-mail this week questioning the School policy of compulsory Saturday fixtures. There are certain immovable forces in life and the commitment to this as a feature of our School life is one. Those few who see weekend commitments as of little importance are not in tune with the culture of the School to which we all signed-up.

Monday 30th November

The harsh winds of winter have been blowing through the campus in the last few days but there has been much to warm the heart. "Stars in Their Eyes", organized by the parents' WSSPA is an annual fixture in the Wellingborough Calendar. The Dining Hall was packed with an even larger number of students than usual to hear 9 varied acts perform. The fact that Conner Brown (with her version of Beggin' by The Saturdays) quite rightly won "the people's vote" was less important than the entertainment provided by all of the performers. Conner won a recording session generously donated by Mark Hutchinson's Rooksmere Studios in Overstone. Further cheer was provided for those of us who braved the biting wind to see the U15A XV defeat the fancied Warwick School in a thrilling Daily Mail tie, 15-12, which in turn means a final 32 tie (out of an original 572 schools) at home under floodlights on Wednesday evening against form favourites Oundle. Last Saturday, following a refereeing stint in the morning, I enjoyed watching the 1st XI girls playing some sweeping hockey to lead Kimbolton 3-0 at half-time. Although they then relaxed slightly the second half was an experience if only for the accidental but bruising body-checks and swinging sticks which would have made most males wince! This Thursday is a busy sporting day because the U14 (County Champions) and U13 (Northern IAPS Champions) Hockey squads play in their national competitions and the cross country runners pound around Croyland Park in the District championships. Next Saturday is our final rugby weekend before squeezing in a block of soccer fixtures against Kimbolton on the final weekend of term.

Having witnessed cadets on drill practice on the top tennis courts in their every spare moment, it was a great thrill to receive a phone call on Sunday to say that the RAF Section had achieved 2nd place out of 34 schools in the Eastern Division's annual RAF Ground Competition; they left Bedford, Bedford Modern, Kimbolton, Uppingham, Oundle, and Stamford amongst others trailing in their slipstream. Our highest place ever means that the 16 cadets, led by Howard Barnhurst, qualify for the national finals in March.

This week's highlights include the Wellingborough Singers' Christmas Concert on Saturday evening and tomorrow's A Level Choices Evening when Heads of Departments, supported by a number of current A level students, present to final year GCSE students in order to help them make informed decisions on their A level courses for next year. We will also be welcoming a larger number of

potential external candidates than previously and they will be joining us at 6.30 p.m. in the Chapel for a special welcome before subject presentations start.

On a more controversial note Blog followers might be interested in the fact that I have received correspondence this week regarding Facebook profiles which are critical of teachers ("should that be allowed?" and "why are the School getting involved in what students are doing in their spare time?") and the types of subject matter to which we expose our sixth formers in our lecture Programme ("do they need to see graphic imagery of Vivisection" and "we are so pleased that you are showing them horrific car crashes?"). As ever one can never please all of the people all of the time – especially in the dark days of late November!

Monday 7th December

Advent is being observed, trees and decorations have appeared and The Wellingborough Singers' Christmas Concert has prompted the first singing of "While Shepherds Watched". The latter attracted a healthy audience packing out the Senior School Hall on Saturday evening. The "Singers" celebrated their 25th anniversary recently and began life in this venue and the acoustics were perfect for the choir, the Peter Collins' "Collegiate Brass Ensemble" as well as for Lauren Hoyle, Alice Turner, Kishan Thakrar and the Senior School Brass Group. It is a week for festive occasions with the Senior School Christmas Concert on Wednesday evening followed by the formal School Carol Service on Sunday evening.

We had a presentation this week on "Google Analytics" which is a programme enabling us to analyse traffic on our website. The fact that an average of only 5 people per week read this Blog is a great body blow to the ego of the Headmaster; to the delight of one of those regular readers, my mother, I will continue though we might follow advice by allowing the "Headmaster's Blog" a more prominent place on the website! We have also seen the first draft of the new promotional DVDs for Prep, Senior and Sixth Form to complement the Pre-Prep placed on the website earlier this term. The Bursar has informed us of further progress towards School-wide electronic communications and next week's mailing will be evidence of this.

Success eluded our sports teams who were seeking national glories : the U15 XV went down in the last second of the game to Oundle; the dramatic 8-12 defeat was taken in great heart and with laudable sportsmanship by the players. The U13 hockey players also fell heartbreakingly short in their national finals but they have the prospect of a national competition later in the school year though that will include club sides. A final word for the senior rugby XV which, after a litany of injuries, completed the season on a high note with two deserved wins. The week saw a visiting Australian sports touring side from Melbourne, at the same time as plans are coming to fruition for a new round of multiple trips for our own pupils; China, Paris, Barbados, Morocco are a few of the destinations in varying stages of planning.

The Young Enterprise season began in earnest last weekend ahead of the Swansgate Trade Fair this coming Saturday morning. Many will have seen the teams with their honey products, "Study Buddy Board" and the Christmas boards selling at recent School functions and each of the entrepreneurial Year 10 teams enjoyed a successful day at the Grosvenor Centre yesterday.

Monday 14th December

I would draw readers' attention to the forthcoming End of Michaelmas Term mailing (much of which will be electronic) and Headmaster's Letter which will include reference to a number of important Whole School matters such as Out of School Visits, key Trinity Term dates, Bus routes, Foundation matters and Work Experience.

The Senior School has its pupil-organised Charity Day on Thursday; last week Weymouth completed their impressive fundraising for Emmanuel Children's Home in Nepal and their contribution to that fund through their labours was in excess of £500; if you venture to Waitrose in Rushden this coming Saturday, Cripps' House boys will be packing bags as a contribution to their Sahara Trip and Alzheimer's Fund.

Wednesday evening's Christmas Concert was memorable not only for the brave soloists, the brass and the Blues Band but for the enthusiastic support from the audience. The Christmas Carol Service was equally well-supported with Hilary Askham (OW) who read a lesson and Chloe Marshall (OW) who made her presence felt in the choir, being welcome additions along with the Brass Group and

the Chapel Choir itself who added et more to the evening. Of course Sydney Elliott and Joseph Mullan from the Pre-Prep and Hannah Caress and Tom Blason Head Girl and Head Boy in the Prep School, maintained the high standards from as representatives of their two parts of the School. We look forward to this Wednesday's Prep School Concert and the services on Friday.

We will be planning for a number of developments in format and lay out of the website in the New Year but I am hugely grateful to those – and there were significantly more than five – weekly blog readers who took the trouble to respond to my comments last week about the Head's Blog. You might be interested to learn that they were current parents (all ladies!), prospective parents and even former members of staff.

Saturday proved to be a mad race from seeing the Young Enterprise competitors at the Swansgate, the cross country runners at Wickstead in Kettering and the footballers over at Kimbolton. It was not a chore because at each location there were many youngsters (some of whom who had been partying at the Weymouth Dinner on Friday evening) who epitomize the philosophy of taking part with gusto. We even achieved Footballing success at 1st and 2nd XI despite the non-appearance of the transport and only a week's preparation after last week's final rugby fixture.

Mrs Hennessy introduced me to the judges who visited the Prep School last week from the "Take One Picture" National Gallery Competition and they emphasised that they had been hugely impressed with the quality of Art work which they had witnessed in the Prep School. The English Department was similarly complimentary about the impressive Essay Competition entries.

I wish those regular readers in particular, as well as those who have stumbled inadvertently across this blog, an enjoyable, restful, family festive season!