

Head's Blog – Michaelmas 2008

Monday 8th December

Coughing and spluttering have been the prevalent sounds this week but the survivors, many of whom rose from their sick beds, have produced memorable performances in a number of end of term events. I hugely enjoyed the Year 8 Play 'A Midwinter Night's Dream' and Mrs Drye's direction of some very talented actors enabled them to show off their abilities to real effect.

The Wellingborough Singers' festive Concert included the Junior Prep School Choir as well as significant contributions from Mr Marshall, Mr Runnells and Mr Arwyn Jones. The annual School Carol Service took place on Sunday evening in the typically atmospheric surroundings of the School Chapel and on Wednesday around twelve different ensembles perform at the Prep School Christmas Concert. There is something for everyone!

Last Thursday a number of those not laid low by colds and flu took part in the district Cross Country Championships at Croyland Park in Wellingborough. There were victories from Senior School pupils James Lambert, Guy Marshman and Fleur Starcevic and Prep pupils Emily Bowe and Ed Jackson; a large number of others gained positions which mean that they have now all qualified for the County Championships in Abington Park after Christmas.

Parents have passed comment to me recently about their commitment to educational visits whilst quite understandably wanting us to be aware of the problems faced by us all in the current financial downturn. We are acutely aware of this and we will be seeking to keep costs to an absolute minimum for all trips. We will also be looking to raise funds to supplement these trips whilst trying not to "hit" those who are already making sacrifices to fund their sons and daughters. On Friday 23rd January we are hosting a 'Sports Trivia Quiz Night' in the Senior School Hall, 7pm start. £8 a ticket including supper. This is to raise money for the New Zealand tour – details from the Sports Department.

We have today held a ceremony to mark the opening of the new Biology Laboratory and followed it with a lunch in honour of Miss Amaryllis Bigley, her husband Judge Machin, QC and her mother and widow of Dr Donald Bigley (OW and Head of Parker's in 1935). It was the latter's estate which made a contribution to this new facility in the Garrett Building. The project is a direct beneficiary of the tireless work of Debbie Whittemore and The Foundation.

Monday 1st December

There is a theory, firmly supported by some, dismissed out of hand by others, that the final week in November is the lowest point of the School year; a time when tempers are short, behaviour worsens and morale falls. Whether one subscribes to the existence of "Seasonal Disorder Syndrome" and as an external optimist I do not, one cannot avoid the fact that teachers are under stress with deadlines to be met for examinations, marking and report writing as well as the completion of inspection documentation and budget paperwork. With youngsters at the same time growing in confidence and flexing their muscles, this amounts to a heady mix. This last week has seen us trying to see our way through changes in the February Ski Trip scheduling which now mean a 2.30 a.m. departure, understandable angst brought about by clashes between different activities, concentration lapses from some pupils, parental concerns, unhappiness with refereeing decisions all super-imposed upon daily national economic gloom. If one allowed, it could be difficult to get up in a morning, however even accepting our shortcomings, there are always grounds for optimism. Friday evening's "Stars in Their Eyes", Saturday's Pre-prep Christmas Fair, the successful NITEX on Saturday night/Sunday morning and the Royal Marines' "6 Miler" from Earls Barton, each provided one with a sense of pride and belief that our community, whilst having like any other family things on which it can improve, is alive and interesting. The performance by Lauren Hoyle in her rendition of Don Maclean's "Vincent" was simply stunning and her personalised interpretation would have graced any professional stage.

Oxbridge Interviews are looming and our applicants are busily undergoing practice sessions in an attempt to provide some pressurised questioning in their fields. We wish each and every one of them good fortune in their quest at either Oxford or Cambridge or indeed elsewhere.

The final two weeks of term see Wednesday evening's Senior School Concert, The Year 8 production of 'A Midwinter Night's Dream', The Wellingborough School Singers' Christmas Concert on Saturday 6th December and of course the Wellingborough School Carol Service, on Sunday 7th December tickets for which are available from Mrs Whittington, my PA.; this Service starts at 6.30pm. The Prep School Christmas Concert follows on Wednesday 10th December and both Senior and Prep Schools have Christmas services on the last day of term.

As an arduous term of sport reaches its conclusion this week both the U15 XV and the senior girls' hockey XI unfortunately lost in their respective national competitions and the flu epidemic depleted our weekend sides. On Thursday, 4th December, at 12.30pm. many of our runners from Senior and Prep Schools will compete in the District Cross Country at Croyland Park.

Following last year's hugely successful experience we have launched the 2010 Wellingborough School American Drama Exchange with provisional details available on the Website as a PDF form under Senior School/Co-curricular/Drama/USA Exchange 2010.

Our Charity efforts continue to prompt extensive efforts. I tasted some excellent baking at break time in the Prep School and plans for the School Prefects' annual Charity Day are in hand.

With the football season fast-approaching the OW XI have already had success in the national Arthur Dunn Cup and play again in London this coming Saturday. Readers might like to hear that Kettering Town are using the 1st XI pitch for their training sessions on Thursday and Friday mornings and have complimented us on the quality of our facilities.

After lengthy research we are due to launch on Monday 8th December a new text-messaging service for the Prep School in the first instance and then to be extended across the School once teething problems are overcome.

Every family will receive this week a Parental Questionnaire as part of the ISI Inspection team's research ahead of their visit in March. These forms are utterly confidential and parents are requested to complete one for each child in the School.

Monday 24th November

It was a joy to see the Pre-Prep pupils at their Christingle Service last Friday and the pleasure derived by the 6th form from the "Ready Steady Cook" event organised by Elaine O'Sullivan. Mr T's reds and greens won the day!

At the weekend I managed to see at first hand six of our teams in away fixtures at Ratcliffe and Stamford; abilities varied, the results were mixed, but the commitment and parental support were obvious and there was no lack of effort despite the biting cold wind. At this stage of the winter term fatigue and injury as well as pressure of academic work combine to conspire against sporting success, however, this coming week we have the Hockey 1st XI playing at Rugby in the Midlands finals and the U15 boys playing in the last 64 of the Daily Mail Cup in Norfolk. Both teams have enjoyed successful but arduous seasons to date and we wish them well and hope that they enjoy the rub of the green in their quests for national accolade.

The week includes the return of the perennially popular "Stars in Their Eyes" in the Dining Hall at 7.30pm. on Friday. Tickets are available from SS Reception.

I would ask that readers take the opportunity to look at the Christmas cards which are on sale designed by John Dutfield and Senior School art students. They cost £3 per pack of six (1 of each design) and are available from SS Reception with profits being divided between Macmillan Cancer Support and Africaid. Praise this week should be directed towards the RAF Section's "Cranwell" team which came 6th in the East Area Regional Ground Training Competition on Sunday (23rd) - our highest place yet (7th last yr) and after only 2 weeks' practice! Our initial entry was lost by the toss of a coin and then a team withdrew with just 3 weeks to go, losing us 4 precious weeks of practice time. However, our position this year is testament to the enduring benefits of that effort last year. This year's team will lose only three members, and there are plenty of keen S10s coming up to compete for those places. So we are hoping for a higher finish next year which will take us on to the National Finals.

Speaking of the CCF the traditional "Six Miler" is scheduled for this coming Sunday when, regardless of air or ground temperature, the route along the Nene between School and Earls Barton will be home to honest sweat and endeavour and littered with Marines earning their berets. We wish them luck.

Monday 17th November

Occasionally in life one experiences something which ought to be "bottled" and marketed especially at times when stress is high and winter is harsh. "42nd Street" in The Castle Theatre was very definitely an example which warmed the hearts of the cast of over 50 and the support of over 80 others who helped put on the show. The audiences of each of the four performances were universal in their praise of the leads and the singing and dancing of the chorus. Kerry Buckby's choreography, Ian Riley's orchestra and the work which he did with Michael Gividen on the singing were special. Chris Martin-Sims deserves the highest of praise for his direction and enthusiasm, Ruth Bowe's boundless energy and expertise with direction and her managing of the backstage team helped create a lasting Wellingborough School memory. What is perhaps most important is that the cast with its mixture of young, fresh S9s and experienced S13s in their final year rehearsed and performed as a true team throughout. There is no praise too high for the way in which they worked and conducted themselves: they brought joy into the lives of so many families and made many parents and teachers immensely proud.

This year's Young Enterprise teams have sprung into life this week. "adeo" who hope to sell Hessian products, have produced an excellent prototype of their proposed product which is a biodegradable plant pot, recognising the difficulties of recycling plastic containers. They have sourced their materials and, this last week we held a meeting with the Governor of the local prison, HMP Wellingborough, with a view to out-sourcing the manufacturing. We are delighted to support this partnership. It re-enforces the links of schools and the local community working together.

We also have a company "Dynamo" who want to design teenage posters. They are working with Charlie Ward and Jeff Clarke both of whom are OWs.

Visitors to The Castle might also have seen "Exceeding Expectation" turning Coke cans into a speaker for an I-POD. There is a great achievement in persuading The Coca Cola legal department to say "yes" to this initiative; we are delighted to see our youngsters maintaining our tradition of developing entrepreneurs in the making!

On the sporting front it was a pleasure to see the 1st XV, despite a number of current injuries and their narrow midweek Daily Mail defeat, recording a very good win at home to Bloxham; the junior teams recorded notable away victories. Currently the U15 XV continue to impress with their regular Saturday success but also their progress in the Daily Mail Cup where they next play Wyndham College in Norfolk having dispensed with The Perse 19-0 in the last round.

The Scholarship Information Evening this evening was designed for potential 13+ applicants and to explain both the process and the principle behind Academic, Music, Art, Sport and Drama Scholarships and Awards all of which will be assessed in January. It is worth mentioning the distinction between Scholarships (based on merit) and Bursaries (based on financial need and assessed through means-testing). The other distinction made was between Scholarships and Awards. The latter attract financially lower sums and are to award ability in either individual subjects or levels slightly below scholarship levels elsewhere. The maximum sum attributed to a scholarship holder is 15% of school fees although this can be increased up to 100% through a means-tested bursary. The website has all of the relevant details.

We would like to offer our very best wishes to Mrs Miller who has left having made a huge difference to the running of the Music School in the last few years. We welcome in her place Mrs Liz Burleigh, who takes over as Administrator this week.

Friday, 28th November sees the return of the perennially popular Wellingborough institution 'Stars In Their Eyes' in the Dining Hall at 7.30pm. The evening event will incorporate a SCCWID Fashion Show. Tickets £7.50 (including supper). All ages welcome! Tickets available from SS Reception. If you wish to take part please contact Mrs Whittemore on 01933 233441, 07773 787738 or dw@wellingboroughschool.org.

Christmas cards designed by John Dutfield and Senior School art students are on sale for £3 per pack of six (1 of each design), available from SS Reception commencing week beginning 24th November. Profits to be divided between Macmillan Cancer Support and Africaid.

Plans have begun already for the annual visit by Tony Budell, who is hoping to come to school on 8th December, as in previous years. The aim will be to collect in Shoe Boxes as much useable (not necessarily newly purchased) stationery which can be sent out with Tony in his unmistakable Land Rover.

Monday, 10th November

The OW Dinner held on Saturday evening in the Senior School Hall provided an opportunity to showcase the forthcoming production of 42nd Street; cast members Adam Cooper, Alice Palmer, Rory Bowe, Conner Brown, Isobel Croft, Charlotte Stevens and Erris Major entertained us with an insight into the song and dance routines on which they have been working so hard (the production has even been mentioned on Radio 2). The evening also allowed us the opportunity to meet old friends such as Tom and Julia Jones, Norma Webb and, of course Graham Garrett the in-coming OW President and Headmaster 1973-93. Long may the relationship between School and Old Wellingburians of all ages remain strong!

Remembrance Sunday is always a poignant occasion with the combined presence of OWs, parents, friends and each section of the CCF. The Service itself, the excellent singing of the Chapel Choir and the respect shown by our young people for the history of our School added to the palpable sense of community.

A thought should be spared for Josh Cliffe who suffered a worrying rib injury playing for the 1st XV in Reading and we all wish him a speedy and full recovery. Although we have had mixed Rugby results recently we are still in the Daily Mail competition and, of our regular fixtures, the 2nd XV's 11-7 victory at Reading and the U15 XV's last-gasp win were the highlights. Mr Lowe's U14B XV which supplied 3 players to an under-strength opposition, saw a talented A team opponent score 4 first-half tries and then switch pitches to the A team fixture where he should have been all along with a final score of 29-31 to the opposition; sport can be unfair at times! All of our Hockey girls continue to achieve considerable success and despite this not being

our official netball term it is worth pointing out that the U14 girls last week won the District championships and have now qualified for the County finals. However, what was most pleasurable was the fact that all of our opponents approached Mrs Burgess to compliment the girls on their play and attitude and to ask if they could come along and observe some of their coaching sessions so that they themselves could learn more about the game.

Would you please ensure that if your children go to breakfast that they do not place their bags in any of the doorways as they are causing an obstruction? In the event of having to evacuate the building these exits need to be clear.

It is difficult to keep abreast of technological change and the monitoring of teenage use of technology, however, Cyber-bullying is a feature of modern life which is unsavoury and a tolerance of it has no place in a genuinely caring community. This week in assemblies we will be emphasising this point. Whether an entry on "Youtube", "Myspace", "Facebook" or text-messaging, whether during School hours or not, our approach is to show the genuine hurt which can be caused by inappropriate comment and to respond strongly in dealing with those who are not prepared to accept civilised behaviour. We will be looking to not only remind pupils of these issues but would also like to hold an Information Evening to raise parental awareness, details will be passed on when finalised.

With the Independent Schools' Inspectorate visiting the School in the week beginning 16th March 2009 we have been asked to carry out the obligatory confidential Parental Questionnaire before the end of this term as part of the information gathering process.

Forthcoming dates for the busy calendar are the "Glitz and Glamour Ball" this coming Saturday, Sunday's Cross Country fixture between the School and the OWs, the A Level Choices Evening for all S11 and possible external applicants on Tuesday 18th November and "Stars in Their Eyes" on Friday 28th.

Monday 3rd November

How fortunate we have been to have enjoyed a two-week Half Term break! I have seen some truly wonderful images from the Geography Field Trip to Iceland and from the cross-curricular Madrid Study Trip. My thanks go to my colleagues for their diligence and professionalism and for providing an experience which will remain long in the memory of those pupils fortunate enough to have visited these two quite contrasting locations. The reports of the pupils' exemplary behaviour are always a pleasure to read.

During Half Term the Art Centre has almost been completed, work has been carried out in Nevill and the project to create a new Biology room in the Garrett Building has begun.

Our weekend includes the OW Dinner on Saturday evening with the cast of 42nd Street making a musical contribution and the annual Remembrance Service in Chapel on Sunday.

Following improved grades through remarks our updated Public Examination results are on the website. We have now been able to produce sufficient evidence of anomalies in selected AQA English Language papers to warrant a full, protected, extended remark though we are unlikely to receive the final marks until Christmas.

We are entering the final week before 42nd Street and tension is mounting, tempers are short but I am sure that it will be "all right on the night" for the run next week at The Castle Theatre.

Girls' Hockey has seen considerable success in recent years and we have played more Tournament Hockey. Shortly before Half Term our girls under captain Alex Hughes won the U18 6-a-side tournament hosted by Rugby School; amidst high tension they defeated St. Edward's Oxford 4-2 on penalty strokes in the semi-final and King's High 2-0 in the final.

Monday 13th October

The lunchtime Enrichment programme is off the ground and will, this coming week, enjoy its first full week. We will evaluate the programme at the end of this term but it might be worth making a comment in relation to a complaint relayed to me this week; we are maintaining a watchful eye upon organizing the programme so that lunch is not disrupted but I can state unequivocally that pupils are never short of food to eat as a result of their attendance at the Enrichment programme! Readers might also be interested to learn that the popularity of "Friday Singers" is considerable, testament perhaps to the influence of TV shows such as "Last Choir Standing" but also to the immense enjoyment derived from House Singing.

As ever last weekend, both Saturday and Sunday, the School was active on the sporting front and congratulations particularly again to our hockey teams. In a former life I was sufficiently fortunate to be able to coach both Club and School 1st XV's and Scottish Schools' sides. Now that so many of my match days are spent either refereeing or simply watching it makes a change to actually take charge of a team. The U15B squad have had little about which to be joyful in the last two years whilst their peers in the A team have

enjoyed well-heralded and deserved success. At Oxford on Saturday the B team's commitment and resolute determination not to be overwhelmed by a physically and technically superior side, would have graced a team at any level. Forced into a situation where they needed two late substitutes, others out of position and with only 14 players, their 5-25 defeat exemplified the role of B team sport in general. I hope that we never lose sight of those below our elite who gain such enjoyment and a true sense of camaraderie. I thank those 14 boys for making my Saturday so enjoyable.

The Half Term mailing will include a confirmation of what is being spelled out to pupils this week and we would respectfully ask for the support of parents in upholding our stance. Those with unacceptable haircuts will be gently pointed in the direction of a Half Term cut so that we can see their eyes and they can see from underneath their flopping mop. Please remind teenage boys that we wish for them to be clean-shaven. We will also enforce a "No Chewing Gum" ban because of the remnants which we find across the site under chairs and on paths and carpets. If there is any doubt in parental minds "The Guide to The School" details our standards as far as appearance is concerned. Tutors and Housemasters/mistresses will be increasing their vigilance and pupils who doubt the relevance of appearance need only consult with those who interview in the competitive job market to realize the grounds on which we base our position.

Friday's CCF Biennial Inspection was a great success. The Reviewing Officer, Commodore Stanford, Assistant Chief of Staff Royal Fleet Air Arm was greatly impressed with the strength, turnout and activities carried out by each section and I await sight of the official Inspection Report. I also took the opportunity to consult with the representatives of the Royal Marines who were already aware of our search for an ex-Marine to take on the running of the section. We are currently exploring possibilities.

Those of us who are wedded to the School will appreciate the suitability of our hosting of A Wedding Fair this last weekend. It provided an opportunity to show our capacity for providing every aspect of a successful wedding day on site. The large number of visitors certainly justified the staging of the event. It is worth commenting upon the fact that there have been those who question the School's involvement in business enterprise when our core function is the education of young people. We are acutely conscious of not in any way compromising the normal life of the School but the answer is quite simple : we are attempting to maximize a much-needed income generation outside of that from school fees. This can only benefit our children's education in the long run.

Rehearsals for 42nd Street which will open at The Castle on November 12th are beginning to occupy an even greater amount of time for the cast and the producers and directors. Mr Martin-Sims, Ian Riley and Kerry Grimes have enjoyed the expert musical assistance of Michael Gividen in recent weeks and we are all much indebted for this.

I was delighted to hear from Mrs Matthews of the encouraging start made by our six Young Enterprise teams, the support being provided by their business advisors and the sponsorship which we have managed to attract as a result of our Business Lunch last summer.

We this week host Steven Player, the Headmaster of Spratton from whence a steady number of pupils have come to us over the years. I will be enquiring about this continued flow especially when one considers the huge successes achieved by ex-Spratton pupils here. I would like to think that we continue to prove to be the most attractive co-educational day alternative to those who choose the boarding school route of Oundle, Oakham, Rugby or Uppingham.

With Half Term upon us the excitement of School life continues unabated with Friday's Fundraising Dinner at Franklin Gardens, the CCF cadets take part in their annual "Autumn Fire" weekend and there are those lucky enough to be heading to either Madrid or Iceland on study trips. Whether or not you are one of those fortunate few I trust that you will enjoy the opportunity to draw breath in your busy lives.

Monday 6th October

The annual HMC Conference, this year held in London, where the Headmasters/mistresses of the UK's "leading" 250 independent schools gather, is an event which invariably attracts media attention. This year as well as the focus being upon the Chairman (Tim Hastie-Smith) announcing that he is to leave the independent sector to head an Academy in Kettering, we debated the future for our schools in the light of changing economic conditions; the flow of so-called "financial experts" spreading words of economic doom and gloom certainly focussed the mind. Beyond these soothsayers an eclectic mix of speakers was gathered including politicians Frank Field MP, Lord Adonis, Lord Patten, Lord Tebbit, Lord Hurd, Estelle Morris and media figures Jilly Cooper, Barry Norman, Sandra Howard and Sir Geoff Hurst. However, amidst the debate on leadership, curriculum and financial matters a presentation on cyber-safety struck a chord with me. This was of particular interest because it 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? We would hope to pass on some of the lessons learned to pupils, teachers and parents in the future.

The S9 Parents' Evening was an opportunity to communicate with parents after pupils had completed their first month in the Senior School; it also allowed me to emphasise that "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 evening enabled me to praise the year group as a whole for the manner in which the pupils have settled in but, ever-wary of complacency, to remind both 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 Royal Marines' Section has had a difficult time since the departure of Mr McGuirk and it is to the immense credit of Vic Decaro and his team that they managed to achieve a position of 12th out of 18 schools' Royal Marines' sections in the annual Pringle Trophy last weekend. We are actively seeking someone with a Marines' background to take over the running of the section so that we ensure our traditions are upheld. This Friday the CCF as a whole is due for its Biennial Inspection by leading professionals from each of the different sections of the services.

Saturday morning saw Open Days for both the Pre-Prep and Prep Schools and I am delighted to report healthy attendance from prospective parents and this was particularly the case in the Prep School where 60 families, the highest ever, visited; in 2004 there were 14 people in total and some of them were from the same family! The banners for this event are rapidly being replaced by those for our hosting of this coming Sunday's Wedding Fair. Readers will be familiar with our drive for increased commercial enterprise, this being the latest example, and hopefully it will prompt further use of our Chapel, catering and Senior School Hall facilities as a wedding venue package.

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.

There are still tickets available for next Friday evening's New Zealand Sports' Tour Dinner at Franklin Gardens which promises to be one of those social evenings for which Wellingborough School is renowned!

Monday 29th September

May I briefly return to the question of Public Examination results as I would like to update readers on the fact that since the Wellingborough examination results were published in August, at A level, eight History results have been raised, one Maths A level has been raised and we await ten other A level remark outcomes. At GCSE 18 Art results have gone up a grade each and five English Literature (including one from a B to A*); we still await 82 English Literature remarks as a result of our sampling of ten as well as twelve remarks in other subjects. We will not receive these until November when we will be able to publish our final statistics; at that point we have no doubt whatsoever that we will be able to show that there were no sinister motives for withholding statistics, indeed quite the reverse.

A new colleague commented on Friday that nothing had prepared them for the amount of activity during the course of a week in this School. On Tuesday evening we have our first Parents' Evening of the year in the Senior School and we will discover if the parents of new pupils feel likewise. To reinforce this fact I witnessed at first hand a hugely successful Fairer Trade Fair on Wednesday; our pupils and Mrs Burgess made a significant contribution to making the Wellingborough area the leading location for Fair Trade sales across the UK. Similarly the annual Macmillan Breakfast and Coffee Morning held in the Quad and the Senior School Hall were events to make one proud because they brought the whole community, old and young, together in a common worthy cause. Because we invite comment about what we do and how we do it, we do at times have to field adverse comments but these occasions provide one with a sense of what is important rather than what can be only mildly irritating. The £2000 raised for cancer research is not insubstantial.

Friday also saw the first of the year's CCF and Duke of Edinburgh training days and special mention should be made of this year's Pringle Trophy Team, led by Vic Decaro, which this coming weekend will be taking part in the Royal Marines Independent Schools' competition at Lympstone. Having seen them training again on Saturday morning one has every reason to believe that they will rise to the intense competition of the occasion.

With a lull in the rugby fixture list, it was a pleasure to be able to watch the 1st and 2nd XI girls' Hockey sides on Saturday afternoon. The 3-3 draw in which we dominated only to concede a late equalizer was frustrating because of the three high quality goals which we scored and the dominance exerted. The defeat for the 2nd XI was also frustrating because it was only when we were four goals behind that we showed that we could compete on a par with the opposition.

The School's Showjumping event which was held on Sunday at the Milton Keynes Equestrian Centre was a triumph for the organization of Katherine Owen and her invaluable band of pupil, staff and parent helpers. Not only did our riders of all ages perform well but the day was a first-class public relations success for the School as a whole; the horsebox which tried to make its way on to our school fields at 8.45 a.m. certainly would have added an interesting new dimension to our on-site facilities!

As an indication of the quality of the staff whom we are able to recruit readers might be interested in a recent Chronicle and Echo article which focused on Mrs Julia Hennessy the new Head of Art in the Prep School, who taught and inspired six out of the top ten GCSE Art students in the country!

Monday 22nd September

We are never far away from differences of opinion in life and one could argue that this is healthy! Wednesday's House Singing Competition prompted controversy in the sense that once again Parker Steyne's led by Dominic Major produced a superb performance only to be pipped by both Weymouth and Nevill houses. The winners' standard was excellent and credit to Katy Flint and Lauren Hoyle but it is a source of great satisfaction, without any hint of sexism, that a boys' house can compete on such an equal footing with the girls.

Attending Friday's presentations by the three DofE Gold Award teams was rewarding in that the very spirit of the Award was exemplified in the palpable sense of achievement obvious from all of the 18 S13s from whom we heard. This is the largest cohort the School has ever had at this level and is testament not only to the pupils' own resilience and character but to the support in preparation from the staff team under Richard Dempster.

One never tires of the sense of community when so many positive events are taking place around School and following on from a packed Saturday of sporting fixtures with, once again, considerable touchline support, the Murder Mystery Evening was a heady thespian cocktail of complete nonsense & previously undiscovered acting talent; all characters were mostly fictitious – any reference to real life individuals the audience thought they knew was utterly co-incidental. The atmosphere throughout the evening with many families present and Charlotte Bull even using it as her 16th birthday party, was something which I wish could be bottled and marketed! We raised over £1000 to support the November production of 42nd Street. The four musical numbers from 42nd Street certainly whetted our appetites as well. Again on Sunday the Harvest Festival Service saw the Chapel packed with S10 pupils and their families who all heard a charming poem from Pre-Prep pupil Anna Elson and an address from our old friend Sheila Addison with latest news from the Emmanuel Children's Home in Nepal.

We have seen considerable efforts behind the scenes in preparation for both the Fair Trade event on Wednesday and the Macmillan Coffee Morning and Breakfast this coming Friday and we look forward to both events with eager anticipation.

Last summer's leavers heading off to university go with our best wishes and a number have received contributions to their academic expenses from the Nevill Trust by virtue of their A level examination results. We hope that this is rightfully seen as evidence, matched by very few other schools, of us supporting our pupils beyond the school gates.

We will be seeking to undertake some market research through questionnaires as part of our self-review process at Parents' Evenings this year. We hope to gain further insights into parental views on the School and our activities; the aim is of improving our service further still by listening to suggestions. One proposal that was put to me today was that we ought to 'host' coffee mornings/drop in sessions during term-time. As Mrs Barnhurst commented, many parents just want to know what is going on and teenagers typically say little! This would not be a parents' evening replacement but an opportunity to find out what other children are really doing - 'my child usually does a couple of hours per night', 'my child does nothing at home', 'should we be encouraging him to think about Oxford', 'do many other sixth formers have jobs' etc. Perhaps we could use Saturdays and tie the idea in with fixtures. I will canvass the Friends' Committee at this week's meeting.

The Independent Schools' Careers Service presentation evening this Thursday will allow many of our S11 to be brought up-to-date with their individual career profiles through the Futurewise programme and this will form the basis of the guidance which they will receive over the next three years and beyond. For those who are heading off on a Royal Navy trip we will provide a subsequent presentation.

The Wellingborough School Showjumping event which was cancelled in May (due to the appalling weather conditions), has been re-scheduled for Sunday 28th September. Anyone wishing to support the team competing against around 40 other schools would be very welcome. Directions can be found on mkec.co.uk. We are obviously hoping for good weather and the competition starts at 9am. Riders from all three parts of our School will be competing!

This week we will be following up the statements made to pupils and colleagues last week about the necessity for an awareness of the existence of fellow pupils who suffer from nut allergies. This is a potentially life-threatening condition for which we all have a shared responsibility in terms of reducing the potential risks.

Monday 15th September

There were many highlights last week : the sun shone briefly this weekend, the "Men in Green jackets" tell me that some drivers of large cars have handed over their keys asking for assistance to park, George Houghton received official recognition that he has passed his NQT Induction year and the Coffee Shop was deemed a huge success. Last week I was asked if the calming colour in the Dining Hall was having any effect and I think that we can answer in the affirmative. My favourite photo-opportunity of the week was the 6th Form enrichment Cookery activity where the sense of satisfaction on the faces of what I had been warned were cooking dyslexics, was a sight to behold! I also 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 abiding memory of my week was probably the first rehearsal for the Murder Mystery 70s theme evening entitled "Who Killed the Headmaster" (get your tickets from Reception for this coming Saturday); set in 1973 memories came flooding back with reference to Tubular Bells, Ford Capris, Angel Delight and Kevin Keegan-perms! The Art Centre extension is taking shape with the timber cladding providing a warmer feel but we are still awaiting Building Control to look into a hole! The week also brought 1st XV & 1st XI hockey wins, good-natured touchline support in particular for the U14s who have begun their campaigns. The Nevill Trust's annual benevolence was demonstrated again at this week's Trustees' meeting when they agreed to provide grants to the highest achieving A level pupils as they go up to university, to support some of the most successful GCSE and AS level examination candidates, to provide funding for two interactive whiteboards for the Geography and MFL departments as well as Bursary support in 2009-10. The Trust's generosity is invaluable.

This week we have a Harvest Festival Sunday Service specifically for S10 pupils and their parents. We are launching the lunchtime Enrichment programme details of which will appear on the Website. We also have one of the highlights of the calendar : the House Singing Competition which takes place in the Dining Hall on Wednesday afternoon; the Coffee Shop will remain open but I would respectfully ask parents who attend to ensure that young children are kept away from the balcony rail and remain as quiet as possible whilst pupils are singing.

Looking ahead to next week (Wednesday Sept. 24th 2.30pm - 5.30pm in the School Hall), inspired by their PSHCE lessons, a group of S11 pupils has organized a Fair Trade event and pupils and parents from across the whole School are invited. They are showing work and running stalls to promote the awareness of ethically-sourced produce and recycling. Fairtrade Tea, Coffee, and Hot chocolate, Chocolate taste testing and Smoothies and fruit are on sale; we are asking for book and toy donations for an exchange stall. There are also stalls run by outside businesses.

Amongst all of the Olympic hype readers will have noticed the presence of Anne Panter (OW) in the GB Women's Hockey team. Today I received a reply to a good luck message sent by us "It always means a lot receiving messages of support and I was genuinely taken aback by the number of ex-Wellingborough School pupils who got in touch during the Games. I would love to come back into the School at some point. I have never forgotten where this journey started out for me - on the slightly sloping grass pitch behind the cricket pavilion! I would also like to present the School with one of my playing vests from Beijing as a thank you for all the support I received whilst I was there."

Monday 8th September

We enter the first full week of term having survived three days of the new Car-park layout, the new Dining Hall layout and the new structure of the School Day. Good-humoured chaos prevailed at times but the incessant rain did not dampen our spirits. The start of a new academic year is always rightly associated with optimism and confidence and we wish Ms Everett the best of good fortune as she begins her custodianship of the Pre-Prep School. Bright faces and new uniforms were in evidence at the traditional New Pupils' Service which marks a relaxed, broad welcome to families across the Senior School. There was a full congregation and one can only add that those who were not present missed a treat because we were all heartened by the sense of vitality of the new members of our community; this year in the Senior School we have 91 new S9s including 15 from outside of our own Prep School, 15 new 6th formers as well as 3 other new pupils. Our numbers across all three parts of the School, despite the inevitable impact of the much-hyped "credit crunch" ,are buoyant; we are looking forward to a year of energetic school life. One only has to witness the very tiny people who undertake the Herculean task of walking up in the pouring rain from the Pre-Prep and negotiating the Dining Hall each day for their lunch before returning from whence they came, to feel that we can overcome most obstacles this year.

We have begun this new school year with a completely refurbished Dining Hall with its sparkling Coffee Shop delivered on schedule. We also await the opening of a new Art extension and I know that Mr. Mitchell is delighted with the refurbished girls' Changing Rooms. We have also made attempts to alleviate our parking problems with an ingenious reconfiguration of the car-park; judgement is reserved on whether anything other than a brand new tarmac, purpose-built carpark will have the desired effect of calming traffic and tempers but this is certainly a feat of workmanship on the part of the Estates' team!

Our deliberate non-appearance in the recent GCSE and A Level League Tables has prompted a good deal of comment. The decision was taken essentially because, although we accept that League Tables are a yardstick by which some judge schools, we consider them to be flawed and misleading. The intention is to place our results in the public domain once the re-marks and appeal process has been completed because, most importantly, we have nothing to hide. The decision has already been vindicated because we have uncovered at least three separate major clerical errors; one of these included 18 GCSE Art pupils who all had their grades raised last week after some intensive lobbying on our part; the changes have had a considerable impact upon our statistics. Essentially we have again achieved Public Examination results of which we are proud, which maintain the standards set in recent years and which reflect the hard work done by teachers and pupils alike; the vast majority of pupils achieved, in our professional opinion, what their abilities deserve.

A [new structure for the School Day and Week](#) has prompted almost universal approval. Lessons of 35 minutes have been replaced by those of 55 minutes each and assemblies Chapel, tutor and House meetings have been allocated time at the beginning of the day. This week sees the commencement of Learning support and Music lessons and we will be watching with interest to see how smoothly these run under the new structure. Once the perennially popular House Singing Competition is completed later in the month we will embark upon a new Enrichment programme during the lunchbreak which will provide over 40 options for pupils to enhance their co-curricular experiences.

We have already had the added pressure of hosting the Festival Meeting of the Federation of School Lodges. The manner in which the catering, Estates' team and the CCF cadets and the School Prefects who helped all rose to this challenge, brought worthy accolades from our 350 visitors who came from all over the country. We have begun our extensive sports fixture programme, rehearsals for 42nd Street are once again in full swing, everywhere House singing practices are in evidence, Personal Statements are being constructed by those seeking to apply to university this year and reminders are being dispensed about shirts and ties : in fact it is business as usual!

Readers will see the up-and-coming events on the Calendar pages but I would draw attention to the Murder Mystery Evening on Saturday 20th September, the Harvest Festival Service on Sunday 21st September and Macmillan Breakfast and Coffee Morning on Friday 26th September as occasions not to be missed.