

HEADMASTER'S REPORT ON THE YEAR 2006- 2007

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Introduction

To commence with a conclusion: 2006-7 has been a year with a roll in its progression and swagger in its gait – or more properly its Archway. In the 1920s Mayor Privett and Canon Barton devised inscriptions to mark the acquisition of the first part of Cambridge Barracks from the War Office. Recent years have seen a focus on horizons rather than milestones, as befits a Governing Body presided over by an Admiral. So it was appropriately behindhand when new inscriptions marking the acquisition of Cambridge House in 2000 were finally unveiled at a special party in September. Sir Alfred Blake, a former pupil of Barton, gave a splendid impromptu reminiscence; we named the David Bawtree Building, and unveiled a portrait of former Chairman David Russell, by Sheldon Hutchinson, RP.

The year ended with more inscriptions and another party, at Hilsea, where a tree is now planted to mark exceptional sporting achievements. The intention is to make Hilsea as intimidating to away teams as that row of skulls that welcomes visitors to Kurtz's waterside hideout in *Apocalypse Now*, or the dressing room beneath the Kop. Here too the Chairman could not escape memorialisation: he became National Rugby Fives Doubles Champion for the fifth year in succession (precise category withheld for fear of Age Discrimination). An elegant and champion female shot-putter was on hand to help him place his commemorative plaque beneath the relevant sapling. Meeting resistant earth in the collective force of their palms, the plaque shattered.

Sport

Other sporting achievements have also caused little surprise. In recent years PGS has radically extended its fixture list (particularly to include boarding schools), increasingly developed B and C teams, and striven to ensure consistency of ambition and attainment, especially at regional and national level. *Rugby World* ran an article on our rising standards, especially mentioning the 1st XV's victory away at Bryanston, that team's first home defeat in eight years. *The Daily Telegraph* noted not only that landmark but also the away success of the Cricket 1st XI, gained off the last ball, in a new fixture v Marlborough. Millfield has stood in the way of our National Cricket aspirations for the last two years: in June the U12s became the first year group to record a victory against them (Hockey victories started some time ago).

Achievements in Girls Sport have perhaps been even more noteworthy. Four years ago we lost 80% of the Netball games we played against the big boarding schools: this year we won 90%. Four years ago we lost our big boarding school Girls Hockey fixture at every age level save one: this year we won every game. Every Girls Netball team got through to the Regional Finals; the Juniors reached the National Finals for the third year in succession. In Boys Hockey we reached the National Finals in every age group, the first time a school has accomplished this. Last year the Girls became National Athletics Champions. The message of their *We Can* banner temporarily seemed not to extend to this year's clash between their invitation to represent England at the magnificent Jean Humbert World Schools Athletics Championship in Bordeaux, and their last Physics GCSE exam. But to their aid came the resourcefulness of Mrs Spofforth, the exam hall of the International School of Bordeaux – and the rally driving of Ms Linnett and Mr Dossett. Thus the girls were in the exam hall at 8.00, on the track at 10, bartering PGS Development Office Teddy Bears (particularly popular with the Chinese) by lunchtime – and snapped for a popular magazine before the day had ended. Twenty four countries took part: some send all their athletes to the same school, and a final place of 17th in this context was, to use a relevant descriptor, decidedly better than *OK*.

International honours for sport have also gone to Hockey players Simon Faulkner and Michael Russell, Cricketer Chris Morgan, and Sailors Hannah Diamond, Rebecca Diamond and James Peters. No arbiter exists to tell us when we have achieved our aim, and become the country's top co-educational day school for sport. But we are now ready to strike the standard, and claim the kingdom. Let pretenders respond to this trumpet.

The Arts

Drama too lengthened its stride, with *Guys and Dolls* again raising standards (as also some admiring eyebrows). As Miss Adelaide, Sarah Verrecchia, once the Angel Gabriel in the Pre-Prep Nativity play, wooed the ever dependable Glynn Jones and led a chorus of twenty girls, each clad in a satin swim suit made to measure by Mrs Giles. At least one cast grandmother had her reservations about attending this family show; and one parent, cornering me relievedly in the foyer of the Kings, expressed her delight that her daughter had been selected for the Salvation Army. Mr Hampshire and Mr Cleary would want me to pay tribute to the work of our Director in Residence, Rebecca Baxter. Hers was the extraordinary choreography, eg for *Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat*. 'An absolutely perfect highlight which would have been widely acclaimed at The National,' commented an Admiral's wife from Alverstoke, speaking proleptically, for the National Youth Theatre did indeed accept Sam Tyrell the subsequent week.

In the summer term there was effectively a repertory drama festival. Mr Garnett's swansong was a gloriously amphibious Middle School *Wind in the Willows*. There followed a blood curdling Open Air *Romeo and Juliet* from the 6th Form at Hilsea, and an enterprising and astonishingly professional *West* from Year 11 at the Kings, to go alongside an earlier *Caucasian Chalk Circle* from Year 10. Youthful talent, and commitment to the high and rising, required some concluding *coup de theatre*, and thus somehow in August, by crook and with Hook, another new venture, the summer school play, *Peter Pan*, finally flew (by scheduled flight *bien entendu*) to Edinburgh. Here a 5 star review on the Fringe ('*Peter Pan* by Portsmouth Grammar School is simply superb') confirmed that PGS Drama emphatically has lift off.

Music

The school has recently been commissioning pieces for its Remembrance Sunday concerts in the cathedral. The first, from 2001, Cecilia McDowall's *Ave Maris Stella*, based on the school window in the cathedral, was broadcast on Radio 3 last autumn: Aled Jones described it as wonderful. The latest commission, from Lynne Plowman, was the first to involve the Junior School and almost all the parts of the building. There were around 100 performers in all, amazingly marshalled by Nicholas Cleobury. Four of these commissions are to be recorded, by Avie records, later this term. For the first time, we invited a period orchestra, the Hanover Band, to play for the Passiontide concert. I have heard *Messiah* many times, by forces ranging from extraordinarily professional to breathtakingly amateur, in venues ranging from European cathedrals to London Hospital wards. This was the best: staggering in its pace, firm in its grasp of form, attentive to emotional nuance, fresh but also robust in choral sound (thank you, Mr Cleary). Paul Brough conducted the whole work, uncut, from memory. This was the orchestra's first outing under their new conductor, and most auspicious for all parties, since Paul is a former PGS pupil.

Festivities

The artistic glut continued with the eighth Portsmouth Festivities, meticulously organised by Mrs Pippa Cleary, and previewed in *The Guardian*. They included the opening of the new Conan Doyle exhibition at the City Museum, and the presentation of the Freedom of the City to the ship's company of HMS Endurance. David Juritz, the Leader of our Associate Musicians the London Mozart Players, broke off his much publicised world tour for Musequality to play Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* in the Cathedral, whilst Peter Phillips, conductor of the Tallis Scholars, brought his group for the first time to the city of his birth, about which he was interviewed beforehand by Radio 3 presenter Catherine Bott. There were lectures on the Falklands (Brian Hanrahan and Julian Thompson), Slavery (James Walvin), Kipling (Andrew Lycett), and Children's Literature (a family occasion, with Michael Morpurgo). There were youth events and drama events and cathedral twilight events galore, including a new Jazz Eucharist. The Festivities are of course now a well established and unique part of PGS's contribution to the local community. Plans are in place for the next five years, culminating in the Dickens bicentenary in 2012.

Staff

We said grateful farewell to several members of staff moving on (Ms Benlekehal, Ms Kafoure, Mr Garnett, Mr Henderson, Mrs Piggott, Mr Pineo, and Mr Thorne). Mrs Lavington, pioneer of the reincarnation of Greek, retired, as did Mrs Lockyer, veteran of 17 Junior school Drama productions, of which I shall most fondly remember a gloriously amusing *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1999. Mr Pitt moved back to Whitgift to become Second Master. Our academic systems, once a rugged but untuned 4x4, were turned by Mr Pitt into a sleek Ferrari – though loyal members of his 2nd XV have decently requested that this comparison should not be extended too multilaterally.

PGS staff lead by example declared a recent headline in *The News*. Improbably, this referred to a picture, taken on National Bike to Work Week, which showed three senior staff biking past the archway in gowns and mortarboards, with not a fluorescent flash or safety helmet between them. Elsewhere however I can assure readers of staff commitment to a multiplicity of healthy and risk-assessed extra curricular activities: Ten Tors (abandoned because of flooding), CCF camps (in eight locations), and Christmas Ski Trip (over 100 pupils to the USA), to name only the most obvious. One canny member of Year 9 spotted a combination of such opportunities that ensured that he passed only two days of the Easter holiday at home. Portsmouth thus returns full ironic circle to the Northern world of Mr W Squeers, who guaranteed parents that their child could be offered terms without endings.

Distinctly Extra Curricular

In other ways too, the year suggested Squeers' principle that charity begins at school. I cannot speak too highly of the pastoral care which, supported by its medical and counselling team, PGS now offers, and some pupils now managed to persuade staff to do something further. In *Strictly School Dancing*, on 25 May, Mr Doyle/Mrs Jepson, with dapper waist/hemlines, swept the floor. In *School Idol*, on 8 June, Mr Priory and Mr Weaver were triumphant (sterner critics found their rendition of *I Predict a Riot* particularly persuasive). Almost £3,000, scooped up by Miss Tabtab and her helpers, was raised for Barnardos and Breast Cancer Research. Several days later, to raise money for Cry, many members of staff consented to have sponges thrown at them in a pillory, witnessed by a throng (all of whose identities have been retained on camera). In fact the mood of the mob was admiring rather than hostile; and, bothered that the event might not raise enough money, Mr Herbert resorted to selling water by the bucket rather than sponge load. I thought, whilst pinioned, that this offer was being a little too eagerly taken up by Mr Priory, and seek to reassure readers that my reciprocal gesture, of course, constituted not personal revenge, but a dispassionate and highly symbolic reassurance of the school's commitment to fulfil in the widest possible sense its charitable responsibilities, with maximum vigour, right through to the highest levels of management.

A Levels

The year was indeed full of managerial reassurance. The school's full complement of 13 Senior Teachers asked pupils to fill in graded response sheets about their lessons. Responses to the question *Do you understand what is being said?* ranged from the laconically evasive *Kind of*, through the more honest *Yes, but sometimes I can be mystified*, to the following mantra of sincerity: *Yes, unless spoken in Spanish*.

But – let me immediately reassure you – A Level results in Spanish (with 10 out of 11 pupils securing an A) were a record, as indeed they were for the school as a whole. The A % of 58.2 was the highest ever, as was the UCAS points per entry score of 108 (previous best 105.4 in 2006). The AB% of 85.4 equalled last year's significant record. Fifty one pupils got more than three A grades (previous best 37 in 2006) and 48 pupils got only A grades (previous best 34 in 2006). Three A Level pupils won Board Prizes: Natalie Crawford and Jason Shirley for Biology, and Jade Wimbledon for Philosophy and Religious Studies. In addition I can now report that Patrick Breen was awarded the Royal Society's award for coming top in the country in the Advanced Extension Award for Chemistry. Joy Clarke won

a Gold Medal in the UK Biology Olympiad. Jack Shotton and Daniel Cannell did the same in Physics, and Jack also won a Gold Medal in Chemistry. Then in Maths, Jack went several steps further. He was selected for the UK Maths Olympiad team, and after training and acclimatisation in Australia, took two four and a half hour papers in Hanoi, each with three questions worth seven marks each. He scored 31, the top British mark, and can now claim to be the twelfth finest Mathematician in his age group in the world as well as the best in this country.

GCSEs

At GCSE records were also broken. With a complete remark of English Literature pending, it looks as though the current A*% of 40.6% will easily be the finest ever. Equally pleasing was that no one failed to get 5 A-Cs and no one failed to pass in Maths or English, a feat which has now been sustained for several years. The school has never known more widespread press coverage of individual GCSE achievements. There was coverage in the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, indeed in pretty well every newspaper under the *Sun* (defined as, and including, the *Mirror*). Matthew Blagden, once struggling with leukaemia, gained only A*s. Alice Gibb, photographed for *Vogue* by Mario Testino in her GCSE year, gained nine A*s: in its *A-Z of 2007 Fashion Trends*, *The Observer* had declared that A is for Alice, but revision will now be necessary (for the magazine at any rate). All the Athletics Physicists had got A stars. True, on progressing from reading Question 1(b)ii (*Explain why the relay is needed*) to Question 5 (*This question is about the motion of projectiles*) I had immediately realised they were more than in with a shout. But now again I was moved to regret the absence in Bordeaux of an adjacent Ladbrokes.

In all this excitement we almost failed to notice that there was a record number of Board Prizes – fifteen in all. No fewer than five of these (Biology, Drama, English, English Literature, French) were claimed by Jemima Hodgkinson (this in itself a record) and three by Samuel Evans (English, English Literature and PRS). There were also Prizes in PRS for Corrado Musumeci, Olivia Sinclair, Alison Taylor and Eloise Waldon Day, in Biology for Benjamin Andrews, French for Megan Freeman, and Spanish for James Aspden. The complete roll call of teachers with Board Prize Winners this year includes (large breath necessary) Mr Burtt, Mrs Carter, Mr Doyle, Mrs Gozalbez-Guerola, Mrs Jepson, Mr Nials, Mrs Piggott, Mr Priory, Mr Richardson, Dr Richmond, Mrs Stevenson, Madame Stubbs, Ms Toland, and Mrs Tyldesley. The list challenges the diaphragm. But it also confirms just how much one aspect of our input (the pupil) corroborates the other (the staff). We have of course some very bright pupils, but 30% of our pupils would be rejected by a state grammar school. We are far more comprehensive a school than we are ever given credit for (especially since the extensive revision of our Scholarship and Bursary scheme): the Common Rooms brim with proven and dedicated practitioners.

Destinations

The *Times Educational Supplement* ran a feature on our UCAS process, which again guided a magnificent 93% of pupils into their first choice university. The supply line remains firm. The *Independent*, surprised at the school's robust transparency, was allowed to be a fly on the wall for the 11+ marks meeting: education correspondent Hilary Wilce was struck by the broad ability level we admit and the constancy of the application rate. Nor is it only the

Senior School that is turning people away. The Head of Nursery, Mrs Johnson, recently went to the Commonwealth Club in London to receive her Early Years Professional Status Award, along with 54 others from across the country. The DfES has awarded Mrs Johnson £5,000 to spend this year and again next. Not entirely as a consequence, we had our first Christmas Tree in the Quad, and, playing on the spirit it engendered, Mrs Johnson enticed me to the Nursery, to read my favourite story, Jill Murphy's *Peace at Last*. Though rated only 7,587 by Amazon, this is assuredly the equivalent of *War and Peace* within the Nursery literary canon, epic in its judicious exploration of the dynamics of the threatened patriarchal family.

Retrospect

Circumstances have not always permitted PGS Headmasters to subside so snugly into their beanbags. The Archive shows many a Head, or Guest of Honour, who despaired at Prizegiving of buildings, brains, or brawn. Nigel Watson, author of the forthcoming school history, recommends these reports as the best guide to the school's development. In 1952 Headmaster Donald Lindsay described the PGS buildings as 'ugly and rapidly ageing'; and he was even gloomier about the finances. To his successor Dennis Hibbert the buildings remained 'desperately inconvenient.' JW Stork in 1943 'began by saying that the school was largely composed of ordinary boys, who might never achieve academic distinction.' It was little different in 1905, when the Guest of Honour noted the lack of candidates for universities (but not of the Bishop of St Alban's, who was supposed to be speaking but had missed his train).

There were of course other things for Guests of Honour to celebrate and remark on. Major General W Douglas-Smith in 1918 'was very struck by the tone of the school, the boys always looking so cheerful and well dressed (*great laughter*).' But his predecessor, as Lieutenant Governor, Major General JK Trotter, noted in 1908 that the cadet force was 'not as strong as desired,' and he urged all boys to 'show moral responsibility' and join. And how. By 1915 the Revd RS Medlicott could report that PGS 'in proportion to its numbers, had sent more boys to the fighting line than any other public school' – as it had also done in the Boer War.

And now? I thought of Trotter's exhortation, and the cheers which had greeted it, when I laid a wreath at the Menin Gate, where the Junior School Brass band performed in July, below a panel commemorating Lionel Schloss, one of many OPs who have no known grave, to whom Trotter had presented a prize for Latin on this occasion.

No one would wish to underestimate, not least in this context, early PGS pride, nor the many individual and corporate achievements so representatively and impressively documented in this evening's programme. These include not only the knowns, the Wally Hammonds, the Arthur Darby Nocks, but also the now-known-unknowns, like Lionel Schloss and those other OPs commemorated beside him at Ypres and its adjacent lines to death. But, as I was advised, the difference with modern times is striking.

Explanations

How and why? Not the quality of Headmasters, certainly: I can nominate many pre-War Titans (like Jerrard or Lindsay), many gents and scholars (like Nicol and Stork), and I doff my cap to them, the first PGS Headmaster to be state school educated and an undergraduate Oxbridge reject, with humility and admiration and respect. Has it been co-education? Well, yes, that has certainly helped. The Pre-Prep and growth of the Junior School, presided over by the wonderful Mrs Foster? Yes – that too. But most of all, I suggest, it has been full independence. In the last ten years, as the Office for National Statistics has recently acknowledged, more and more money has been spent on state education without a corresponding rise in results or contentment. By contrast, over a slightly longer period, Independence has forced PGS to stand on its own two feet. Why? Parents. Independent parents have to value education enough to be prepared to pay for it twice over. Hence the imperative for a school like PGS to have excellence in its all round provision.

So whereas in 1959 the Guest of Honour, the Vice Chancellor of London University, Sir Thomas Creed, could report that he ‘was pleased to find how quietly and easily PGS was being gradually converted to the standards of the modern grammar school’ this year I am able to report on a year of achievements expressive of an altogether new identity, and of a school which is now confident and at ease with that.

Indeed the year 2006-7 has had not only a roll and a swagger in its gait, but also, at last, a confirming and judicious measuredness in its ritual. The Service for New Pupils (400 extra seats necessary this year), the Remembrance Sunday Concert, the annual Musical, the Dickens Birthday and Ides of March Lectures (this year given by Claire Tomalin and Lindsey Davis respectively), the Passiontide Concert and Art Exhibition, the Festivities, and the Open Air Shakespeare: none of these feature in any pre Independence Headmaster’s Report – indeed, it is something of a shock to discover that all of them have entered the Calendar in the last nine years.

Celebration

To these the Sixth Form team now added eloquent codas: a compline in the Garrison Church, a Leavers’ Book Ceremony in Buckingham House, and a party afterwards to set the seal on that. Leavers were given their own Leavers Tie in light and dark blue. These were the colours Nicol first adopted, to set pupils thinking more about university, with now added to them a small black stripe, recalling those volunteering, with brave and tested disdain for self, for other destinations, often fatal ones.

We had a wonderful party, with extraordinary scenes of friendships both new and old, anecdotes of miles travelled, infanhoods recalled, incidents shared, with sentiment, pleasure, embarrassment, pride, poignancy. On Founder’s Day the preacher was astonished to be applauded, but our pupils – perhaps encouraged by Mr Dunne’s magnificent Programmes and Service Papers – have become increasingly and noticeably adroit at appreciating what one can almost call the sacramental in school life, the extraordinary in the everyday. These events express anew our aspirations, our values. They express anew our outreach to all, and especially to all that is best, in our city. These have become our capital events, allowing us to progress ritually from school year to School Year, to ensure we not only mark the milestones but also survey the horizons.

Conclusion

And so to end at the beginning. 1886 is the earliest Prizegiving for which we have a Report. General Sir G Willis spoke: there are some further details in the inside cover of tonight's programme. The General encouraged the healthy recreation of Portsmouth boys and expressed his pleasure at being able, by virtue of his office, to grant the school use of Governor's Green (good man). If only the boys would look up 'and believe their school "the best in the land" it would not then fall short of that proud position.'

Only believe, indeed. And, indeed, I do believe. Firmly I believe, and truly, that, one hundred and twenty one years later, not just locally, as was once the aspiration, but also nationally, as is now the expressed claim, our lovely school, our family school, our inner city Pompey school, at once both independent and comprehensive, can confidently claim to be the best of its kind in the land. The old Pompey virtues, I hope, remain; but my goodness how PGS has grown and developed over the years. We embrace young people of many backgrounds, many nations, both young and old, both male and female, both little and large, from tottering toddler to rampaging Lock Forward. We are energetic, yes; but we are also now often attentively and distinctively at ease.

So I invite you to celebrate with me this evening the many achievements of our year. But I also invite you now to celebrate with me the many endorsements of the national pre-eminence which they now so persuasively and impressively constitute. Let celebrations commence!

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