



Christmas Newsletter 2007

If, having read all those somewhat impersonal 'Family Christmas letters' which arrive with in ones Christmas cards, you are strong enough for another, then do please read on

Gryphons win the Cup

After a thrillingly close term's competition, which saw over 12,000 personal credits being awarded throughout the school and a further 300 for rugby, hockey and swimming Housematches, Gryphons narrowly beat Lions by just 30 credits.

2007/08 School Magazine

In those soporific moments after Christmas Lunch when the weather outside looks less inviting than the log fire crackling quietly in the fireplace, stretch down for your copy of this year's School Magazine and marvel again at just what an impressive record of the year it is. Having done so, I am sure that you will agree with me that the editorial team of Mr Terry Wintle and Mrs Fiona Russ have done a magnificent job.

Concert Records Shattered

The Senior Informal Concert for Form V & VI children was as spectacular as ever with a staggering 75% of the children in these forms performing a record 48 pieces.

Those of us fortunate enough to be there would, I am sure, all agree that the quality, variety and pace of performances were simply breathtaking.

Ensembles and Groups aplenty

The number of these instrumental music groups seems to grow each term. Indeed, now that we have nine of them - an orchestra, two choirs, two string groups, flute, clarinet, guitar and brass groups - finding places for them all to rehearse each week is proving something of a challenge. My thanks go to Mr Alan Williams and his team of peripatetic music staff for giving up their breaks and lunchtimes to lead them.

Grade Examinations Bonanza

At the start of term we learned that every one of the 29 children who took music exams last term passed; impressively, 5 were at Distinction level and 17 at Merit level. Last weekend a further 12 took exams, so not only is instrumental music alive and well, but we are keeping our fingers crossed for the results.

A Magnificent Day at Radley

A group of our best woodwind, brass and percussion players enjoyed a fabulously inspirational and challenging day at Radley College earlier this term. There, they were joined by scores of other prep school musicians in instrumental workshops before ending the day performing a concert for parents and friends including Jazz Riffs, Batman Theme, and The Champions. A magnificent day was had by all.

Choir Numbers break all Records

Such is children's enthusiasm for singing at Ashfold that Mr Alan Williams has been able, this term, further to expand the size of his choirs to accommodate the wealth of talent. Indeed, with a record 28 now in the Senior Choir there is now barely room for us all in the choir stalls. Added to this the 23 strong Intermediate Choir and 23 or so in the Parents Choir and you will see that Ashfold's choral tradition is stronger than ever.

Harvest Cheer

This term's Evensong was led wonderfully by the Senior Choir singing the Introit "Ave Maria" by Simon Lindley, with a beautifully performed treble solo by Alicia Green, and the Harvest anthem "All things bright and beautiful": John Rutter. The Rev Tina Stirling gave the address and enlisted the support of children helpers as she brought to life the message of the Harvest.

Carols at St Mary's

The highlight of the term for many was the magnificence of the singing at our Carol Service. Senior, Intermediate, Junior and Parents' Choirs all combined to provide as powerful a lead as ever to the congregational singing and their Carols were delightful. I thank you all for your generous comments about the service - it was indeed a moving and uplifting event - and for the £643 collection which was shared between the school's chosen charity (Shelter) and the Thame Barnes Centre.

Senior Choir Trip to Rome Summer 2008

Planning is well advanced to take 29 children to Rome in July 2008 to sing services and recitals at St Peter's Basilica, S. Maria Maggiore, San Andrea delle Valle and The Pantheon. If you needed an excuse to holiday in Rome, then this will be it!

Every Child's Christmas Art Displayed

Mr Phil Cave achieved the near impossible feat again this year of hanging the Christmas art work of every Trans-Form VI child in the Mansion in the run-up to Christmas. Everywhere one looked walls were packed with sparkling crackers, glistening snowflakes and colourful presents - even the Transition Musical scenery was commissioned as a canvas for Transition art. The 'buzz' of children talking excitedly about each others work has been heart-warming.

Thame Show winners

Having yet again provided the bulk of the contributions to the Show's Art and Design Technology Competitions, it was wonderful to see Ashfold children's work so prominently displayed and to see that so many of them (half of our 26 entries) had been awarded prizes; 3 Won their classes, 4 were Second, 2 were Third and 4 Highly Commended - a fabulous endorsement of the quality of Ashfold Art - thank you Mr Phil Cave.

"Rain stops play" - is history!

Thanks to the generosity of parents and governors that for the first time in living memory, not a single games afternoon, or hockey match was cancelled this term due to rain or waterlogged pitches. Indeed, whatever the elements, the Astroturf was always teeming with girls and boys thoroughly enjoying their hockey.

Match Analysis

Winning Seasons all round. Every one of our teams had a 'Winning Season' this term - a tremendous achievement and a testament to the talents of our boys and girls and to the skills of their coaches. For those of you who managed to stay awake during my Summer Speech Day address, you will I hope notice I said 'winning', meaning that the teams won more matches than they lost - encouraging for us all; not 'unbeaten' seasons - an unhealthy state of affairs.

| Girls: | P | W | D | L |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| U9 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| U11/10(A&B) | 18 | 11 | 4 | 3 |
| U13/12 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| Overall 33 | 19 | 5 | 9 | |

The most striking feature of the season has been how swiftly girls have learned to play the Astroturf game and come to terms with the 7-a-side formation. That they have done so and so successfully is in no small measure to the coaching skills of our new Head Hockey Coach, Mr Ben Woodford. The other great success of the term was the merging of the U11 & U10 squads. Indeed, this will be the model we will adopt throughout girls games from now on. Consequently, next term the squads will be called and made up as follows:

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| Senior Girls | Forms V & VI |
| Middle Girls | Forms III & IV |
| Junior Girls | Forms I & II |

| Boys: | P | W | D | L |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| U8 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| U9 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Colts (A&B) | 15 | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 1st & 2nds | 17 | 8 | 3 | 6 |
| Overall 47 | 26 | 8 | 16 | |

As any of you who have been on the touchline throughout the season will I am sure agree, the progress that our various teams has made has been tremendously encouraging. Nowhere more so than at U8 and U9 level where, by the end of the term, our teams were quite unrecognisable from the desperately timid and cautious teams that stepped out onto the pitch for their first matches of the season.

The other really encouraging thing is that both our Colts A and 1st XV teams were made up of so many Form III & V boys who will all still be available to represent these teams next year - the future of Ashfold Rugby is indeed bright.

More Popular than Ever

The range of evening activities we offer continues to attract great support from the children. Indeed, with a staggering 101 (93%) of our 109 Form III - VI children signed up for the Spring Term's evening activity programme, and 76 (70%) of them are booked in for boarding too, so it is clear that these are both as popular as ever.

Hidden talents revealed

Would it be good weather? Would parents find the new Astroturf pitch? Would we have enough players? These were just some of the questions the organisers were asking themselves in the run up to this year's annual Parent/Staff Hockey match. After some last minute press ganging at morning drop offs and thanks to strong support from the school staff, 24 of us turned up for what proved to be a surprisingly enjoyable morning's exercise. Mr Ben Woodford ran a splendid – if rather energetic – warm-up to reduce the chances of muscle strain and then a mini 6-a-side tournament followed.

As it turned out many of the parents (particularly from Pre-Prep) proved to have hidden talents on the hockey pitch and are already carded for next year (oops, now you know!) The standard of play was high, the spirit was one of friendly competition and both experienced and novice players enjoyed themselves. After which we all gratefully consumed the by now legendary Deborah Dale team teas. Our thanks go to her and to Rachel Currie for press ganging us all into playing.

The 'Going' was Good

The weather was fair and the going good underfoot as Lisa Wright briefed around 50 parents and children prior to setting off on the annual Ashfold Fun Walk. With a combination of marker flags and strategically placed volunteers (thank you Debbie Swift, Paul Currie and Lisa Wright) to ensure we didn't lose anybody on the four mile route, the intrepid walkers made their way across fields, past inquisitive cattle and up hills to Brill where spectacular views and liquid refreshment awaited them. It was then time to begin the final descent back down towards School and to a well earned cream tea provided by - yes you've guess it - Deborah Dale and her team.

A good time was had by all although maybe next year's route may have to be extended for one walker who, not challenged enough by the steep terrain on offer, decided to run back home to Shabbington after the walk – still we can't all be as fit as AJT can we?!

Our thanks to Sian Miller for setting such a cracking pace as front marker (or was it that she was just trying to keep up with Edward Elgin!), to Edward's mother Caroline for acting as a splendid back marker and collecting flags with her team as she made her way around and to Rachel Currie to organising the day and marking the route before most of us were out of bed that morning.

The Ashfold Book Circle's Term

This term we have read 'The Shadow of The Wind' and 'The Memory Keeper's Daughter'. We have also enjoyed fine wine and excellent nibbles, especially at our last meeting, when Mrs Chantler and Mrs Bathurst provided great home made delights. Next term, we are going to review 'Silas Marner' by George Eliot in January.

Our group of parents, teachers and ex-parents is a very cosmopolitan mix. We always welcome new members. If you would like to come along and talk about the book, or listen to others, whilst enjoying a glass of wine and some small eats, please do feel free to come to the Library, the dates for the next term are listed in the Fasti. We always welcome new people. It is a relaxed evening, after which, we all leave motivated to read a little more.

Parents foster Community Spirit

I am sure that all of us who have attended the fabulous array of Parent events this term (New Parent welcome drinks party, Staff/Parent hockey, a Family Fun Walk, Bonfire & Fireworks, Coffee Mornings and Christmas Fair) would all agree that these have not only been great fun, but they have also helped to foster a wider sense of community. That we have been able to run so many great events is largely due to the dedication and generosity of the members of the Parents Committee and all those others who have helped them. Indeed, if you would be willing to volunteer to help at just one event each year I know it would make the world of difference to our hard-working Committee members.

Scholars' Club Events

The Club again provided the backbone for our two teams which entered this year's Magdalen College Quiz competition for Prep Schools. Although neither team did spectacularly well, they enjoyed the event and maintained our links with the school. The Club also enjoyed a fantastic day in Oxford at the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, where they heard talks on the Vindolanda Tablets and Roman Education, before visiting the Ashmolean Treasures exhibition. The highlight of their day was lunch in St John's and a guided tour of the college, looking at Latin inscriptions and learning about some of the quirky things which make up an Oxford college (such as the lawn which is never to be walked on – except when setting off fireworks!). Two further meetings led by Mr David Chetham and Mr Terry Wintle ensured that there was plenty this term to broaden and challenge our brightest children.

Visits and Outings for All

More Rain please

Without rain, river studies are impossible, so it was fortunate that so much fell during the sixth form's three-day field trip to Lyme Regis! Undeterred by this or by the 1 in 8 climb from the centre to the beach children enjoyed conducting River and Beach surveys, and a visit to the working Town Mill where they learned about the miller's craft, bread making and how today the mill provides hydro-electricity for the national Grid.

The Varsity Match 2007

The entire fifth and sixth form had a great day out at Twickenham watching this year's thrillingly tight Varsity match. With just five minutes to go, everyone was on the edge of their seats as Oxford, camped in Cambridge's 22, kept up a relentless assault on Cambridge's line in what turned out to be a forlorn attempt to regain the lead. Cambridge were triumphant – and deservedly so, but we had all enjoyed a fantastic spectacle.

Tourists beware

Forms III set off well equipped for their assault on Berkhamsted Castle with coats - yes, it was raining again. Although in ruins, they were able clearly to see the original layout of the Motte & Bailey castle dating back to 1066 and learned that this was where William the Conqueror had waited for London to surrender after the Battle of Hastings. Two Mediaeval experts took children through the history of the three contenders for the throne in 1066 before they all had the chance to fire a crossbow; few managed to hit the target – was it coincidence that the other tourists kept their distance?

Ancient Egypt explored

Forms II enjoyed a fascinating day out at the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums in Oxford learning about Ancient Egypt, handling artefacts and examining all the objects they had been learning about in class this term. The high-point of the day appears to have been the ancient mummy whose bony toe was sticking out of its wrappings!

Romans for the Day

After a lengthy journey, Forms I arrived in the ancient Roman town of Corinium (Cirencester) for their day's study of Roman times. Armed with a questionnaire which would test their observation skills – and those of the adults – to their limits, children eagerly embarked upon their tasks. Following a most enjoyable workshop session which involved dressing up in tunics, playing Roman games and making mosaic patterns it was off to the museum shop to spend the £3 which had been burning a hole in everyone's pockets all day.

Poet Gavin Stewart returns

As part of the Junior Department's celebration of National Poetry Day, Gavin Stewart joined us again this year and entertained children with a selection of interactive self-penned poems which for some reason involved them all having to make noises like giraffes and nodding like fish! He then spent the rest of the day working with each of the forms to help them create some super poems of their own.

The Science Museum Visits Ashfold

The London Science Museum Outreach team spent an inspirational day with all our Pre-Prep and Junior Department children, putting on exciting shows and telling stories which supported the topics they had studied during the term. Pre Prep II children helped Farmer Giles pull his enormous turnip (forces), whilst Form II and Transition children enjoyed 'The Blood Show' (a journey through the human body in which they discovered what blood is, what it does and where it goes).

The Wonderful World of Plants

Transition's visit to the Oxford University Botanic gardens involved them working both outside and in the Glasshouses discovering such useful plants as rubber trees, cotton plants, coconut palms and spiky succulents. At the end of the morning they ate their packed lunches sitting next to a giant Christmas tree decorated with flowers, seeds and various other plant materials before embarking upon their final lesson of the day - recycling of the contents of their lunch boxes.

An Inspector Calls

Pre Prep II children were on best behaviour when Inspector Parsons paid a visit and explained to children the different jobs a policeman does and how they keep us safe. The greatest excitement was, however, playing in and around his police car, turning the siren on and off, and trying on his hat and jacket. Fortunately, none were read their rights and Inspector Parsons left empty handed.

£2315 raised for Charity

Mr David Chetham has lead the children's fundraising efforts this term for our chosen charity Shelter with events including a model helicopter raffle, Oval Collections, Jeans for Genes Day and numerous 'retiring' collections following Evensong, the Pre-prep plays and concerts and the Carol Service. Thank you all for your generosity. Of particular note were:

Jeans for Genes Day raises £232

The entire school entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the day chipping in a pound each for the privilege of wearing jeans for the day - it's rumoured that the Headmaster was seen in Thame the week before buying a pair especially for the occasion!

Christmas Fayre Raises around £900

This year's Fayre was busier than ever and raised considerably more for Shelter than last year's thanks, in all likelihood, to a vastly expanded Christmas café enabling parents to rest over a cup of tea whilst their children shopped and played games! The games designed and built in DT proved a great hit again, as was the 'Secrets Corner', though not with the poor ladies manning the stall in near arctic conditions! My thanks to the Parents Committee for organising such a wonderful event and in particular to Mrs Lisa Wright for masterminding the whole operation and for enlisting so many of you to help.

A Harvest of tins and pasta

With every surface of the church groaning under the weight of tonnes of Harvest produce, so generously donated by parents, the Rev. Tina Stirling led our Harvest Evensong celebrations. The store cupboards of the Long Crendon Day Centre and Stepping Stones Centre in Oxford are packed full of our gifts, so it is comforting to know that none of their regulars need go hungry this Christmas.

Record number of shoeboxes collected for Romanian families

This year thanks to your great generosity we sent a record-breaking 264 shoeboxes full of Christmas presents to Romanian families as part of the nation wide appeal 'Shoeboxes for Romania' run by the Christian Charity Link Romania. At the start of our appeal Rev Tina Stirling came to show us a powerful DVD which showed just what a difference our shoeboxes would make to the lives of so many.

Pre Prep Christmas Spectaculars

You couldn't write it. Millie Turner bid for promotion to Prefect by leading compliant French hens, dancing ladies and leaping lords around the stage, Jasmine Brand's outstandingly professional comic timing, Joshua Driscoll's 'enthusiastic' Turtle Doves and insistent stage whispers "there is no need to shout", all had us in fits during both performances. Bella Bowman's solo of 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' meanwhile reminded us all just how confident all our children are at even such a young age.

A Christmas Rhyme. Mrs Gill Venn's masterful merging of the Christmas Story with a myriad of traditional Nursery Rhymes gave all 55 PPII & III children the chance to shine. They all performed magnificently, but particularly impressive were the 'Spiders' George Perkins and Gabriel Flanagan, Camilla 'Miss Muffet' Watkins-Gonzalez, Katie 'Mary Mary' Brine, Joshua 'Humpty Dumpty' Read, Kitty 'Little Bo Peep' Henderson and 'King' William Bowman. Arguably the most impressive was Oliver Oxby whose ability to learn lines was matched only by his great stage presence as 'Santa'.

Where did they learn that? Transition's bossy Royal Family; the autocratic 'King' Ben, demanding 'Queen' Roseanna, vain 'Prince' Joshua and the self-centred 'Princess' Dulcie, all did their best to undermine the 'Theme for the Term' (Personal Qualities) by treating their poor servants appallingly during Transitions impressive Christmas Musical and Concert. Fortunately, Mrs Elaine Giliomee and Mrs Kiron Wilcox 's skilful adaptation of the script ensured that it all ended very much 'on message'.

Father Christmas proved 'A Little Scary'

A hundred children sat with baited breathe as the sound of hooves and bells drummed on the roof. Suddenly, a huge bearded Santa with a booming 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' swept into classrooms, somewhat to the consternation of some of the youngest revellers. Presents all round soon lightened the moment, whilst mince pies, carrots and chocolate in each classroom did quite the reverse for Santa's waistline.

New GAP Students

Zara and Alex left us after a year in which they proved themselves to be magnificent GAP assistants. They are both off to university and they take with them all of our very best wishes. In January we are joined by two new assistants:

Gemma Tuffield continues the long line of students from Wanganui Collegiate in New Zealand. She was a School Prefect, has represented Wanganui in Hockey, is an experienced boarder and passionate about the outdoors, so we are in for a treat.

Nicholas O'Hare joins us as our replacement GAP from Geelong Grammar in Australia. He was a School Prefect, is a keen sportsman and captained their Swimming, Athletics and Aussie-rules Football teams. In the holidays he has coached gymnastics and helped his family running a holiday programme for young children.

Uniform

New School Uniform can be purchased from **Shepherd & Woodward**, 243-245 Banbury Road, Summertown, Oxford OX2 7HN, 01865 554559 www.shepherdandwoodward.co.uk

Ashfold Second Hand Uniform Shop - the shop is open every Tuesday throughout term time 8.00 a.m. - 9.00 a.m. and is run by Mrs Marilyn Cox (i/c School Laundry). Uniform Lists are available from school website or Reception.

NB. On Monday 7th January 2008 between 10.30 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. the Shepherd & Woodward Uniform Shop will be open in the Performance Studio and the Ashfold Second Hand Uniform Shop Open in the old Uniform Shop Room.

Astro Boots & Mouth Guards. After the initial confusion earlier this term, I thought it'd be helpful to clarify the requirements for Astroturf boots and gum guards in the Spring Term. These are needed by all:

Boys in Forms Trans - VI
Girls in Forms Trans, I & II

Headmasterly Pleas

Elync

Most of our urgent and general school communications are emailed to you via an Elync website. Sadly, almost sixty sets of parents have yet to subscribe to this service, which means that we still have to rely substantially upon Blazer Post. Not only is this ecologically unfriendly, but it remains relatively inefficient as it relies upon the uncertainties of children delivering the letters to you!

Please could I encourage all of you who have yet to subscribe to this service, to do so if you can? Please contact the School Reception Office if you would like us to send you further details. Alternatively, you could register directly by logging onto www.elync.org/register/registerparent.asp and follow the instructions you will find there.

Gravediggers Required

The Gravediggers is a parent and staff side which plays cricket on occasional Sundays during the summer term against a number of local teams - always at Ashfold. If you like bitterly contested grudge matches, where the objective is 'win at all costs', Gravediggers isn't for you! Games are all friendlies, and the objective is to have a good contest in an excellent spirit and a few beers afterwards. Chris Heslop, our new Gravedigger Secretary and Team Manager, is always on the look-out for new talent, so if you are an enthusiast, or 'used to play a bit', do please contact him on 'chrisjheslop@yahoo.com', or 07710 597108. Indoor nets are booked every Friday evening next term between 7 – 8.30 p.m. in the Sports Hall, so it'd be great to see some of you there.

Changes of address/Contact details

Please notify the School Reception Office immediately of any changes in Address, home telephone numbers, mobile numbers and work numbers. Without these being up to date it difficult for us to contact you in an emergency.

Astro Carpark

We like to keep the driveway leading to the Astro as clear as possible of cars because it is used by children to walk to and from the pitch. Consequently, the car park up by the Astro should only please be used by staff during the day and at weekends by clubs which hire the pitch.

Exit driveway Repairs

Over the summer holidays we will be undertaking major repairs to this drive. In the meantime we are trying to keep the potholes filled, but unfortunately the weather often gets the better of us. Please continue to be patient with us.

Boarding

Could all those boarding next term remember that a comb or brush, slippers and dressing gowns are essential items when boarding - our supplies of spares, for which we have to charge, seem to be running out ever more quickly!

May I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.



M.O.M Chitty
Headmaster