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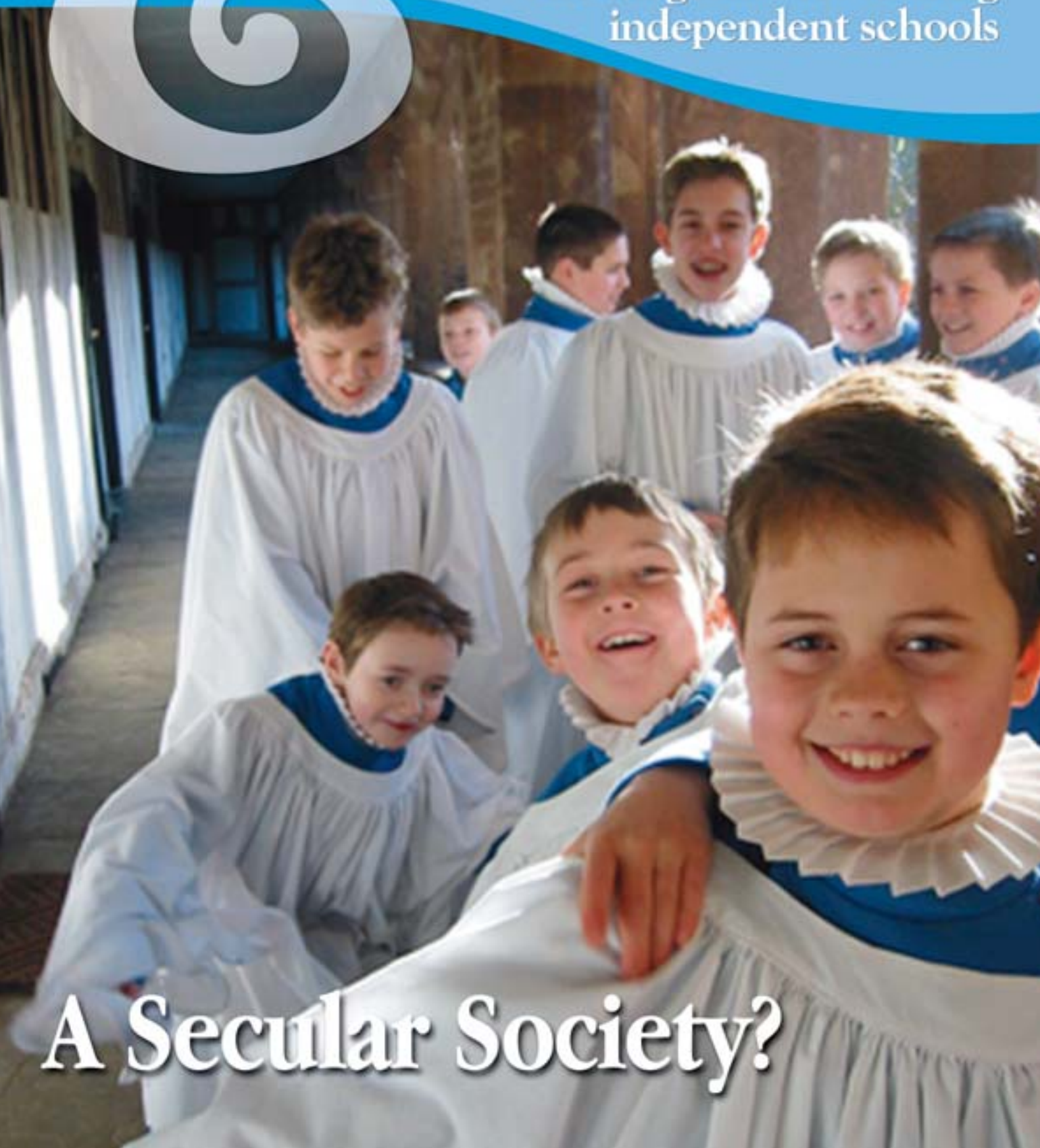
Conference & common room

The magazine for leading independent schools



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Contents

Cover: Music to the ears. *See also page 32*

when hoping it won't happen isn't an option ...

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Editorial

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the value of a league table as judged by an institution is directly proportionate to the value of that institution as judged by the league table. That the government which lives by league tables has been savaged by one of these statistical hound dogs, let off the leash by UNICEF to track the performance of First World Countries towards their children, gives little satisfaction to those whose vocation is the care and education of children.

This dismal conclusion, whatever its validity, is barely offset by OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment ranking our independent schools as the best in the world. What we want is an education system that fulfils the needs of all students, at every level and of every age.

As the Charity Commission prepares to turn the recent legislation into working practice, one is struck by at least two points of interest. First is the degree and depth of genuine consultation the Commission plans to undertake with interested and affected parties. Another is how and whether the shield of public benefit will be claimed by the trustees of the fund set up as part of the settlement of the OFT enquiry.

In addition, when one looks at some of the charities whose status is to be reviewed, Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, for instance, governed as they are by their own employees, would seem to have more to be concerned about than schools with boards of governors which are already engaged, even if, as some critics might say, insufficiently, in the administration of needs-related bursaries and outreach programmes of palpable public benefit.

One problem all governments face is the temptation to indulge in knee-jerk legislation. This reflex, often stimulated by injudicious reading of the *Daily Mail*, can be un-learned by acquiring, practising and maintaining principles. This is not easy, however, if you live, as we probably do, in an increasingly secular society. The assertion of the secular over the spiritual was neatly encapsulated in the famous conversation between Lavoisier and Napoleon. Napoleon wondered about the place of God in the new scientific explanation of the universe and Lavoisier replied, "I have no need of that hypothesis". Leo Chamberlain, Ralph Townsend and Martin Rogers explore this territory.

In his article, Crushing the Spirit, Ralph Townsend wonders what book would be an appropriate gift for a teacher starting out in the profession today. Quite a few might nominate John Rae's *Letters from School* or equally his *Sister Genevieve*. The former is a combination of wise advice and *esprit de l'escalier* – the things we wish – even the quick-witted and articulate John Rae wished – we had said at the time.

The latter tells compellingly the story of a Headmistress whose religious and educational principles proved too strong even for the mayhem of West Belfast in The Troubles. As an end-piece to this issue we publish the introduction to one of John's last books, *The Agnostic's Tale*. The ex-Headmaster of Westminster made people think right up to the end.

Why is it that governments believe business people make good managers? Whatever the answer to that question, there are several articles on the management of schools and the development of school leaders in this issue, including a contribution from our new interviewer, Roger V Mobs. *Conference & Common Room* has every reason to be grateful to Anthony Selden for his skill in finding interviewees and his persuasiveness in interrogating them, as he lays down his syringe of sodium pentathol after the best part of 20 conversations. One wonders what Father Thunder, the Prefect of Discipline mentioned in Tom Muir's *History of Stonyhurst*, would have made of the Master of Wellington's gently persistent questioning.

There is plenty of food for thought in this issue. Indeed, some may find the fare too rich for term-time snacking and grazing, preferring instead to take their copy away with them to the beach as an antidote to the latest OFSTED circulars which must, no doubt, form the main burden of their holiday reading. As they ponder tables featuring the number of children entitled to free school meals, they may find reassurance in the articles on providing school food at home and abroad, whilst they try to remember when it was that the good old Imperial yardstick gave way to the doubtless metric benchmark.

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Mr Wheare,
I am writing with reference to the article in the Spring 2007 edition of *Conference & Common Room*, entitled 'A new exam for post-16'. In this article Graham Able refers to the International Baccalaureate as 'an examination syllabus produced in Switzerland'.

While it is true that the IBO headquarters is in Geneva, the IB is not in fact a Swiss examination syllabus but an international examination syllabus that happens to be partly based in Switzerland.

The IB Diploma Programme was developed by a group of teachers from all around the world and the first seven schools to offer the examination in 1968 were:

United World College of the Atlantic, Wales, United Kingdom
International School of Geneva, Switzerland
United Nations International School (UNIS), New York, USA
International College, Beirut, Lebanon
Copenhagen International School, Denmark
Iranzamin International School, Tehran, Iran
North Manchester High School for Girls, United Kingdom

It is now taught by 1,922 schools in 124 countries. Mr Able might also be interested to know that the IB Curriculum and Assessment Centre is in Cardiff which is not, to my knowledge, in Switzerland.

I thought it might be useful for Mr Able to be aware of this information as the Dulwich School of Beijing, which he recently visited, is in the process of preparing students for the IB.

Yours sincerely,
Neil Tetley
IB Co-ordinator, King's College School, Wimbledon.

Conference & common room

Caption Competition

Speech bubble(s) or a caption are required for this picture. Entries by email to the Editor (tom@dunbry.plus.com) who will send congratulations to the author of the one that makes him laugh most heartily.

'New Zealanders shocked at water-rustling by drought-stricken Australians.'

The winner of the caption competition in the *C&CR* Spring 2007 issue is Simon Leese, Headmaster of Christ's College, Christchurch, New Zealand.
This picture, together with the others which accompanied the article 'Exploring the polar regions' on pages 26-27 of the Spring 2007 issue, was taken by Nigel Williams of Glenmore Lodge, a National Outdoor Training Centre, to whom we are extremely grateful.

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School leadership

Whose job is it anyway? Asks John Dunford

'Business leaders must run schools', stated the headline in the *Daily Mail* in a wholly inaccurate depiction of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) report on school leadership, commissioned by the government and published in January 2007.

The report did not propose that accountants and business people should be drafted in to run schools instead of head teachers. What the report does say is that bursars, business managers and other senior support staff have a major contribution to make to the leadership of schools and that some of these people, suitably experienced in schools and having done appropriate training, could be head of a school.

In the maintained sector, that would mean gaining the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which from 2009 will be compulsory for anyone wanting to become a head teacher.

The bursar has long been a person of great importance in the leadership of independent schools. In some schools, the bursar's line of reporting is direct to the governing body; in others it is through the head.

In maintained schools, there are bursars at several different levels. In some cases, the bursar is someone of relatively low status – the person who pays the bills and answers the question 'Can we afford it?' In others the bursar is a full member of the leadership team, sharing in all the strategic decisions of the school, and servicing the finance committee of the governing body.

Senior support staff in maintained schools have, in the last three years, more than doubled in number, with business managers, behaviour managers and extended school co-ordinators as well as bursars taking their place at the leadership table.

Many of these talented senior staff in both the independent and maintained sectors are now ASCL members and, in ASCL's evidence to the PWC review, we took the line that the best of these people should be able to apply for headships – provided that it was clearly understood that teaching and learning remained the most important activity of the school and that a qualified teacher should always be in charge of this. This is the policy that the government has taken up too.

ASCL unequivocally rejects the notion that accountants or business executives or football managers should be brought in to run schools. Nor would we suggest that head teachers should be drafted in to run businesses.

There have been examples, though, of head teachers moving into business and commerce and, after gaining appropriate management experience in that context, becoming managing director. We undersell our skills as school leaders if we suggest that this could not happen. Research has shown that school leaders have a much wider range of leadership skills than business leaders.

Equally, it should be possible for people with different backgrounds and experiences from the traditional 20 years' teaching experience to make good heads. It has happened in the independent sector occasionally and, although it has not occurred yet in the state sector, the first bursar has now succeeded in the NPQH and will be seeking a headship when she is ready for it.

The Future Leaders scheme (supported by the hedge fund charity ARK) taps into a similarly rich seam of talent – the people who have qualified as teachers, moved out in mid-career into another walk of life, and who are now willing to return to school leadership.

Before they can take on headship, though, there is a probationary year as a supernumerary member of the leadership team of a successful tough London school, followed by a period as a deputy head. One of the 20 pioneer Future Leaders had his teaching experience in the independent sector and, after running a business for over ten years, is thriving in the atmosphere of a challenging 1600-pupil multicultural school in West London.

While the Future Leaders scheme is a direct response to the shortage of head teachers due to hit schools around 2009, as the post-war baby-boomers all retire, the notion that senior support staff could become heads is not an answer to that shortage, but a recognition of what they have to offer. Leadership is already being transformed in many maintained schools and the PWC report set out how the best of these innovations can be adopted elsewhere.

All ASCL members received in March 2006 a copy of Robert Hill's ASCL book, *Leadership that lasts,* which laid out a large part of the PWC agenda. The principles in that book will have resonated with leaders of independent schools – the primacy of teaching and learning, the need to prioritise when there are so many pressures from outside the school, the vital importance of constantly communicating the vision and ethos of the school to all its members – staff, pupils, parents – and, above all, the moral purpose of our jobs as school leaders – that which gets us out of bed in the morning and into school to improve the life chances of the young people in our charge.

Leadership and management of resources, budgets, estates and human resources in the hands of other staff, such as school bursars, is one of the many aspects of distributed leadership that the report promotes.

The report recognises, however, that distributed leadership does not happen at the stroke of a pen. Parents and staff, in particular, still tend to cling to the image of the 'hero head', perceived as the only person in the school who can deal with their problem. Cultural change of this sort takes time – but it is possible, as has been shown in many secondary schools.

Dr John Dunford is general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, of which all HMC heads are members.

All members of independent secondary school leadership teams are eligible for ASCL membership. See www.ascl.org.uk.

Roger V Mobs

interviews…

The Businessman Headteacher: As he leaves his business empires for the world of education, the first of Alan Johnson's new appointments speaks candidly to *Conference & Common Room*

If the success of Lardy Boy Crisps and Shirtless Back Casinos doesn't impress, one look at their owner, Sir Larry Lombard, will. The undulating paunch, straining braces and frank aroma of BO that usher me into the accounts department of St Gordon the Patient School, South London, belie a lean business brain.

"'op it darlin'."

His charming friend Candice vacates the leopard-print sofa as we enter, straightens her pencil skirt and coyly strokes my elbow patches as she leaves. For her trouble, she receives a playful slap on her HB from a guffawing Sir Larry, who gestures me to the sofa before making a chair disappear by sitting on it.

Hard indeed to believe this titan of the boardroom has taken on one of the Prime Minister's flagship schools. He seems at peace with himself as the deltas of sweat spread across the famed puce cheeks and bubble in squelchy menisci above his collar.

"You'll still be providing children with chips then, but now it's going to be more *Mister* than *potato*," I venture with raffish insouciance, remembering the deceptive opening googlies of the young David Frost. He claims not, as he picks himself up from the wreck of the collapsed chair.

"Your crowd are the dinosaurs Mobs, not me. I'm a creative solution."

He's right. A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers' report, which I read upside down on the Bursar's desk, suggested chief executives from business may be the answer to this little horror of a statistic: of the 2500 state schools looking for Heads last year, a third failed to fill their vacancy at the first attempt. It would appear that initiatives to make school leadership attractive again by targeting ambitious, able teachers were not dislodging the coconuts.

Sir Larry continued: "You get me, Mobs, and you get the three Es: economy, efficiency and effectiveness."

"And the three Rs?" I'm on top form: it had come to me quick as a flash.

But maybe it's wrong for an experienced and successful Head to joust so mercilessly, so pertinently, with a tyro from New Labour's cult of managerialism. After all, to HMC Heads, men like Sir Larry have hitherto appeared only on our governing bodies, in the Speech Day beer tent or on the front row, every night, at Sixth Form fashion shows. That a company boss should adopt the noble profession is surely a cause for bunting and champers.

As Sir Larry used all his business nous to sidestep the challenging three Rs question – "Don't be such a prat, Mobs" – I know I'll have to be as sharp as a primary school recorder group if I am to capture for *Conference & Common Room* the essence of a man used to getting his own way.

Soon we leave accounts and I am accompanying the ample knight through the juddering corridors of St Gordon's. Above the Common Room door is pinned Sir Larry's mantra: **'Virtual learning – Franchising – Agency staff'.** I am minded of Dante standing before Hell with Virgil.

A little lass, evidently distressed and fighting back tears, joins us at the bottom of a concrete staircase. She begins the familiar, sorry tale of a school life made intolerable by bullying, but Sir Larry starts his ascent regardless. "Elevator test, Kylie: elevator test."

The girl's lip wobbles, the words come as single spies and not battalions, and then not at all. Little Kylie gives up on the third step and weeps her heart out. We stride on. Sir Larry is unrepentant. "If a customer cannot explain an idea – no matter how abstract – in the time it takes to ride up or down a short elevator, then that idea sucks. She'll learn."

"But she claims to have been bullied," I protest. "Surely, Sir Larry, she deserves an audience?"

HERE & THERE

Debating success

Bromsgrove School's debating team won the European Youth Parliament competition alongside St Paul's Boys' School, London. The pupils now travel to Kiev, Ukraine, in October to represent our country in the European Youth Parliament.

Many congratulations to James Millington (head boy), Kathryn Perry (head girl), Warren Luk, Phil Neal, Anna Perrott, Helen Fisher, Will Fisher, Amy Dobson, Adeniran Haastrup and Theodora Dyakova (HMC Scholar). Local MP Julie Kirkbride (Conservative) visited the school to talk to the pupils and wish them luck in Kiev.

"Ay lad, Turkey Ovals."

"In business, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate."

While Sir Larry was citing the business wisdom of Chester L Karrass, it was becoming apparent to me that the unsavoury odour of petrol-soaked road kill that I thought had been emanating from Sir Larry's lacrimose armpits – the Lombard No 5, if you will – was in fact coming from the kitchens.

In the Oliver stakes, this cost-cutting in-catering smacked less of Jamie than Twist. I enquire as to whether there are plans to get the children into shape, but all Sir Larry offers is "Ay lad, Turkey Ovals." Lurid vending machines act as psychedelic palaces for those twin lords of chaos and misrule, Dr Pepper and Pepsi, while the scarlet shanks of Coke cans flash shamelessly in see-through plastic boudoirs.

Onwards. We pass a vast computer suite filled with open-mouthed children sat in front of noisy screens.

"This, Mobs," enthuses Sir Larry "is the proven, cost effective FOFO method."

"Ah yes," I nod, comfortable with my educational acronyms: "Find Out For Oneself."

"**** Off and Find Out more like. Follow me, Mobs."

"*Saepe creat molles aspera spina rosas,*" I muse in Ovidian reverie – and I know fellow HMC Heads will concur. We move into a language lab. There seem to be lots of language labs, but I don't recognise the language everybody is trying to speak.

"Polish," explains Sir Larry. "Got us specialist status and a government grant. Twenty-seven Polish teachers for the Sixth Form alone. Only language we do. A little piece of Krakow in the Elephant and Castle." The last sentence sounded more like a music hall number than an educational breakthrough, but I let it go.

"Sir Larry, do these children actually *need* Polish?"

"Do they need Polish? *Do they need Polish*?"

Sir Larry brings his face up close to mine, his teeth the colour of empty milk bottles, his breath smelling of Cuba at New Year. I think for a moment he is going to hit me. Instead, he asks me something very simple:

"Does a Harrovian need a boater?"

Zen. One hand clapping.

I fight the Catch-22 with a knowing, enigmatic silence such as the love child of Helen Keller and Leonid Brezhnev might have displayed. I won't be landed that easily.

Unless it is Alexis who wants to land me, Alexis State, the observer from the ministry. Transcendent, predatory, magnificent. Her voice, like her master's in Number 10, tinkled innocently, as a fine crystal chandelier might while it shredded human flesh.

"You're a smug, patronizing fool, aren't you Mobs?" she began frankly. "As you well know, soon Sir Larry will be working alongside a qualified senior teacher who will be responsible for the curriculum. Sir Larry's business genius married to a professional's educational expertise. The future. Frightened it might expose you independent amateurs for what you really are, are you? Well, are you Mr. Mobs?"

"Please miss, [old habits, damn!] I…I merely wonder if individuality and personality are vanishing. 'That one small head could carry all he knew.' Oliver Goldsmith. That kind of thing. You know?"

Oh, she knew all right. "You and your pathetic cult of personalities, Mobs. You make me sick. You lot think of yourselves as messianic, don't you? Oh Lord, how *would* the world survive if the British Public School system fell apart? All those wonderfully batty individuals with their undying loyalty to house, to school, to regiment, to bank, to company, to party, to country.

"But let's look a little closer, shall we? Look at you all with 'Christian' and 'family' on your mission statements while you cheerfully parade the sons and daughters of kiss-and-tell celebrities, drug-addled rockers, vacuous supermodels and party planners in your oh-so-very-snazzy PR material.

"Anything to stay alive, to stay ahead of the game. Oh, and er…franchise anyone? Pick a country: any country. Exclusivity for sale. And I mean FOR SALE. Or maybe – and you could help me out here Mr Mobs, I'm sure – maybe that's just good business?" Not since Luke Skywalker discovered Darth Vader was his dad has so much inner confusion reigned.

The interview is over. Sir Larry walks me to my car. He shakes my hand.

"It's for real, then," I say half to myself. "Alexis isn't spin, is she? It's for real."

"Alexis not spin? Mobs, you could use her as a ceiling fan. But that's true of everyone selling ideas in the 21st century. Like she said: read some of your own prospectuses."

There is a brief pause. We watch a young girl skipping in the empty playground. It's Kylie.

"You see Mobs, you could take a picture of her and you've got all the front page innocence you need. Your adoring public need never know she's playing gangsta on her headphones as she skips. And you know that as well as anybody. Good bye, Mr Mobs."

I get into my car and turn on the radio. President Bush is saying that all the military commanders who have looked at his new plan for Iraq say it will work. That's because all the ones who said it wouldn't work aren't military commanders anymore.

Crushing the Spirit

Power & Responsibility Gone Awry in Schools: Extracts from an address at the Boston-Melbourne-Oxford Conversazione, St Catherine's College Oxford, September 2006

In 1901 every trainee teacher in England and Wales was presented with an edition of Dean Stanley's *Life & Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, DD*. Arnold's biography is a model for any workaholic. In addition to running a school, preparing students for university entrance, dealing with parents, heading a boarding house with all the duties of a housemaster, conducting voluminous correspondence with former pupils and continuing to coach some former pupils by distance learning, he latterly combined the headmastership of Rugby with a professorship of modern history at Oxford.

It is hard to imagine any single book, let alone an exemplary biography, which could claim that kind of status among aspiring teachers in 2006. A guide to educational law, perhaps; or suggestions for self-defence in the classroom, or a plain man's guide to league tables, or strategies for the detection of plagiarism; these might be thought to have more general relevance.

Thomas Arnold's son, Matthew, HM Inspector of Schools in the 1860s, espoused the concept of 'liberal education' as the basis of a modern curriculum, summarised as follows: 'in our culture, the aim being to know ourselves and the world, we have, as the means to this end, to know the best which has been thought and said in the world'. (Literature and Science 1882.) Such liberal learning should be based on the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Interpreted through a differentiated system of grammar schools and secondary moderns, these over-arching skills and values remained in force in the British education system until the 1960s, when the Wilson Labour Government effected major reforms trumpeted as serving the common good and social integration.

Progressively, and over the last 25 years in particular, however, it is not the three Rs, but the three Ts – tests, targets and tables – which are the tightly imposed orthodoxies in English schools. From the baseline tests of five-year-olds to GCSE targets, there is almost no aspect of school life which is not subject to a folder full of documents bearing the mark of the Department of Education and Skills.

Education budgets make up more than half the spending power of an ordinary local education authority, yet the councillors have almost no say over what goes on in the schools for which they are supposedly responsible. As judged by public examination results, educational achievement in all parts of the UK has been increasing since the early '80s, irrespective of Ofsted, league tables or any other aspect of the 'standards' agenda.

The improvement seems more closely connected with the spread of wealth and the liberation of girls from the straitjacket of low aspiration. The truth is that successive British governments have allied themselves to a market-based philosophy of education provision.

Yet there is little sign that our society is any less economically and educationally polarised in 2006 than it was when this gruelling process began. Education ministers have continued to ignore the evidence that crude performance tables punish working-class communities and encourage parents to make comparisons based on social rather than educational criteria.

Could introducing SATs change the anti-educational culture among the country's most disinclined pupils? Well, probably not. Not only must 18 year-olds be persuaded to apply to university, they must be persuaded in their early teenage years to do the reading and thinking required for when they get there. More damaging still is the example of America, whence the tests come, and where the results show a notable correlation with social class.

The tests can be coached, and the fairness of them is currently the subject of fierce debate in the States. Both these points were considered by Cambridge when, recently, it decided not to use SATs but to return to a form of entrance paper instead. In the main, impoverished children do not go to university because they do not apply, and probably do not want to be at school in the first place, a social dislocation that no amount of testing can fix.

The great threat to our education system comes from the growing number of young people who feel disconnected from its purposes, of which the annual escalation in yobbish pupil behaviour is a particularly aggravating sign. A need for a massive change to the educational system was identified at the end of the 1970s, driven by the determination to increase the proportion of children taking and passing school-leaving examinations at both 16 and 18.

The problem is that dogma and ideology about markets have blurred the educational vision, and excessive centralisation, at odds with the free-market approach, has created unworkable structures. Far too much educational reform has been about inventing new structures. There has been a shocking history of dilettantism in all our reforms of the past quarter-century.

Governments have peddled the view that any contact a school can have with business must be pedagogically uplifting. The apparent determination to involve business in the funding and administration of schools and the belief in a particular business-managerial model comes from a credulous belief in the universal wisdom of businessmen. The business of business is business, not the running of schools, for which we should expect businessmen to have no particular aptitude.

Although only some 7% of parents send their children to independent schools, they are a highly placed 7%. It was always recognised that the independent schools were a formidable obstacle to educational comprehensiveness. They kept children out of the state sector and deprived it of a powerful and self-confident vested interest: the parents of those who attend them.

Old Labour never had the courage to touch the independent

schools even when it might have done so. Now, human rights legislation and EU law probably give independent schools unconditional protection (though changes in charity law may propose a genuine threat).

For much of its history the Labour Party had no special view of independent schools. There was, for instance, no feeling that an aspiring leader should not send his children to one of them. Ironically, today no Labour MP could send his or her child to an independent school and realistically aspire to the Party's leadership. Yet the independent schools undoubtedly deliver, and for a Party which believes delivery is all, that matters. The independent schools are not failing comprehensives, and that makes them enviable.

Spirits are crushed in Britain's state schools. Central government has abrogated to itself more and more power, leaving less and less scope for responsible delivery of education to heads and teachers. Whitehall has tightened its grip on the educational system as a whole, creating a bureaucratic apparatus which is pedantic and has brought many strong men and women to their knees.

This is the regime of targets and directives where, despite everyone's best intentions, things all too easily go wrong. Two summers ago we suffered a major fiasco in the marking and delivery of A level results which seriously damaged confidence in our national credential. The key to successful education is through the motivation of young people to want to learn, but motivation alone is not enough.

A *sine qua non* is a strong and steady stream of talented people to take up the creative challenge of teaching. This can be achieved only where heads have the capacity and the freedom to have a clear vision of the standards, tone and style they want to cultivate and sustain in their schools and the resources to pursue their agenda.

In a capsule homily on the dust jacket of Francis Gilbert's *I'm a teacher, Get me out of Here!* (2004), the novelist Philip Pullman writes: 'Schools like the one [Gilbert] describes need to be transformed: and the only way to transform them is to put the best people we have into them – and also the same level of resourcing that's enjoyed by the pupils of Eton, Winchester, Harrow, Westminster, and so on.'

This is easier said than achieved, of course. The idea of a separate caste with the cultural authority to dispense knowledge and wisdom now appears dubious to many in the cultural West, a consequence of increasing egalitarian attitudes, the decline of deference accorded to academics and the educated in general, and the prominence of 'celebrity culture'. (See Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, OUP 2005.)

Yet good schools, well led and confident in their house-style, can still attract talented teachers passionate that what they have to share with the young can really make a difference**.** It is inconceivable that we shall ever dispense with the mechanics of system in conducting the affairs of modern mass education, but let us at least not forget that education aims to protect and enhance the freedom of the human spirit.

When those of us who teach feel most dispirited, beset by the crush of modern institutional and political rhetoric and bureaucracy, we can do worse than remember what Michael Oakeshott wrote in *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, (Ed. Timothy Fuller, Yale 1989):

'The great threat to our education system comes from the growing number of young people who feel disconnected from its purposes.'

'Each of us is born in a corner of the earth and at a particular moment in historic time, lapped round with locality. But school and university are places apart where a declared learner is emancipated from the limitations of his local circumstances and from the wants he may happen to have acquired, and is moved by intimations of what he has never yet dreamed. He finds himself invited to pursue satisfactions he has never yet imagined or wished for. They are, then, sheltered places where excellences may be heard because the din of local partialities is no more than a distant rumble. They are places where a learner is initiated into what there is to be learned.'

It is the duty of those of us responsible for the delivery of an education that really nourishes young lives, to continue to press that perspective upon our political masters.

The author is Headmaster of Winchester College.

Newman the Prophet - part two

A Catholic Eton? Newman's Oratory School by Paul Shrimpton (Gracewing 2005)

The story of the founding and early years of Newman's Oratory is not just history, nor the whole story. In the present time the arguments about the style and nature of faith schools is of importance to many more people than just Catholics.

Circumstances have changed. The phenomenon known to sociologists as the narrative of modernity[1], has had a profound effect on schools. 'Modernity' means all that is seen as desirable today: 'it has its own cardinal virtues, including "freedom", "objectivity", "rationality", "privacy", the authority of conscience…'[2]

The emergence of modernity has coincided with the successful entry of Catholics to the mainstream of society and has influenced it. Although important vestiges remain of old prejudices, especially in the press, the change in the last 40 years is almost palpable and is owed in part to the success of the Catholic independent schools.

One immediate effect has been that the sense that Catholics were not welcome at the great Anglican schools (though there had always been some at Eton), not only faded, but was replaced by an active will to recruit Catholics, boys and girls, or, with increasing coeducation, boys and girls together.

The distance from home of a Catholic boarding school is often greater and some Catholic parents feel that their need for Catholic schooling is met by chaplaincy arrangements in a non-Catholic school and it is better to have their child nearer home or else weekly boarding. That is a world apart from the 19th century. Equally, Anglican schools found that parents would now look around for a good school near at hand. All schools found that mother's views counted in a way they had not done earlier.

The second change that has deeply affected the management of schools can be summed up in a single phrase: the Children Act of 1988. From one clause in that Act has emerged a whole structure of national inspection of independent schools and, in more recent years, of boarding provision, bringing the attitudes of the social services into schools.

Those attitudes can be summed up also in brief phrases: privacy (one of the key virtues of the narrative of modernity) and supervision, which might be thought to smack of those supposedly Jesuitical practices disliked by Newman's friends and so frowned on by the champions of responsibility for the young 100 years ago. Both attitudes, particularly the latter, have forced massive modification on the independent schools, day and, especially, boarding.

Teachers must be a presence today in ways which look more akin to the old practices of the Catholic colleges than to the public school model. I do not think any housemaster would accept today the advice given by a head of house to a friend of mine in one of the great southern schools 40 years ago that he should go through the green baize door a great deal less.

The third obvious change has been in the attitude of the young towards the use of authority. All holding of authority was questioned during and after the events of 1968; a new mood seemed to seep across the Channel or else from Carnaby Street through universities and schools. A lot of rethinking of structures and approaches in schools was needed and was undertaken with considerable success, albeit with casualties along the way.

Success has depended on determined leadership through difficulties. It is not just that hard and soft drugs, alcohol and sexual indulgence have brought a new level of threat. It is that it is very difficult today for the young to direct their contemporaries, or to take decisive steps in the face of wrongdoing.

It can be done, and I have seen it done, but it is a different world from that in which a prefect or monitor, who would be doing national service after leaving the school, would act with confidence in a disciplinary situation. The change is certainly not all loss, but it is a change of importance.

Of these three changes, the coming of Modernity is the most profound, affecting all schools and society itself. It lies behind both the changes in legislation and in adolescent attitudes. It suggests reflection on the purposes of schooling, and more especially not just of Catholic education, but of Christian education at large.

Modernity can be seen first in the advance of secularisation. The assertion of the independence of the secular from the spiritual has been a long story. The validity of natural reason has long been accepted. To anyone with even an inkling of the philosophical tradition of St Thomas Aquinas, known as Realism, the Universe must make sense in its own terms; yet grace, the active presence of God, sustains nature and works within nature.

Secularisation has come to mean the marginalisation of religion within society. The steady decline of religious practice in the second half of the 20th century in most parts of Europe is evidence of this, along with the vague sense that science has 'disproved' religion or at least made it irrelevant.

Newman foresaw this situation with extraordinary clarity in his Dublin lecture on *A Form of Infidelity of the Day:* 'They look out for the day when they shall have put down Religion, not by shutting its schools, but by emptying them; not by disputing its tenets, but by the superior worth and persuasiveness of their own'[3].

Secularisation is not the whole story; evidently, in America, the separation of Church and State has not impeded a strong religious sentiment. A second feature of modernity is characterised as 'the subjective turn'[4]. Put at its simplest, it means that people now look to their personal feelings for validation of their attitudes, so that a personal spirituality and the aim of self-fulfilment replaces the old religious attitude.

Modernity brings into question any possibility of definite truth in religion, just as it also implies a corrosive criticism of civil institutions. 'It makes the human person the originator of history and truth and the agent of his or her own actions'[5]. Distrust of institutions becomes endemic, and that is as destructive of society as it may be of the Churches.

'Most parents who choose a Catholic school today are very clear about their religious motivation.'

This attitude is very close to what Newman described as the anti-dogmatic principle, 'the mistake of subjecting to human judgement those doctrines which are in their nature beyond and independent of it, and of claiming to determine on intrinsic grounds the truth and value of propositions which rest for their reception simply on the external authority of the Divine Word.'[6] In other words, dogma is excluded because it is not knowable by reason. This attitude relates closely to relativism, the idea that we cannot perceive objective religious truth. It is all a question of truth *for me*, not of truth itself.

This shift in society's attitudes beyond question affects the young. Catholic schools, maintained and independent, still generally have a clear idea of their mission and many are developing a strong view of humanity as understood fully only in Christ, to quote one of Pope John Paul II's reiterated phrases.

Such a development has a continuity with the sense of Catholic purpose which has always inspired the Catholic educational effort at every level. Moreover, most parents who choose a Catholic school today are very clear about their religious motivation.

For the Anglican schools, an outsider might be permitted to say that it looks different, because the common attitude of many families in those schools, and many of their teaching staff, while not unfriendly to Christian faith, may be largely indifferent. Determined and devoted Christians work in these great schools, and in larger numbers in the independent sector in all likelihood – but they face an uphill struggle because liberalism and relativism have a strong hold on the minds of their families.

In the Catholic schools too, the work to be done has much of the same character, because all our young people absorb the attitudes of our time from their peers and from the media and they all face the same questions as they grow up.

Catholic schools have all had to rethink traditional religious practices in these new circumstances. Religion does require the cultivation of good habit, but there is need also for space to develop responsible choice. But the Mass, the use of the sacrament of reconciliation (Confession), and daily prayer are still central to the Catholic school today.

A Catholic school still insists on the proper place for theological study at every stage in the curriculum. So do some Anglican schools. There are certainly some assumptions from the past that must be abandoned now, most notably the idea that a young Christian can be protected in his or her faith by the inculcation of habit.

It is more convincing now to see growing towards adulthood as a process in which there are choices to be made and crises to meet. Questions of meaning, of purpose, and of relationship, correspond to a Christian mind with the choices of faith, of hope, of love, in moral terms, the choice of virtue. What choices are made is the responsibility of the person choosing, or, to use the sociological language used above, of the subject; but it is the family and the school which should show what choices are possible.

The choices are not abstract: the fundamental question to each generation is that of Jesus to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, "Whom do men say that I am?" Ultimately, Christ is "the Mystery to be encountered"[7] and we should be inviting the young to a sense of the sacramental in the world. This is not to diminish the role of intellectual understanding and expression of faith, but it does suggest the importance of a school in which there is a wholeness of vision.

It is also something for once to have a powerful force on our side: the importance of friendship is a subjective value strongly held by the young. Such friendships are not just a matter of career networking, but can provide a wonderful mutual encouragement based on shared and valued experience. They are one reason why many look back on their

schooling not as the best days of their lives, but, more proportionately, with delight.

Such an experience of schooling that encompasses experience of a Christian sacramental community has a further, unique and abiding value. One of Ampleforth's first girls came from a completely secular school. She wrote that it was wonderful to be somewhere it was natural to be Catholic. This is not indoctrination, but the empowerment to choose.

The common reaction of irreligious parents today to these questions is that they are leaving it to their children to make their choices as they grow up. But parents and schools which do not open these choices are parents and schools which have accepted the secularising and relativising agenda of the times.

It is ironic that what are now called faith schools are under attack from secular humanists, whose vision of society requires all to share the same social experience in which the possibility of faith is pushed to the irrelevant margin and moral attitudes inculcated which are destructive of Christian virtue. You might call this attitude *totalitarian liberalism*.

Powerful though they are, the secular humanists have not swept the field. The legitimate demand of the Christian minority in the United Kingdom for schools that accord with the deepest convictions of parents is something that should be theirs, both as a human right and as the right of taxpayers. Christian schools are attractive to many who do not enter a Church.

An optimist (and it is best to be optimistic in regard to education) might suggest that the City Academies and the Education Bill of 2006, even modified as it has been, might present a new direction. I wrote over two years ago that the agenda should not be the abolition of independent schools, but the abolition of state schools and the bringing of all schools into trusts out of local authority control.

The idea was rubbished by some, but independent schooling under the state might achieve a more profound and meaningful co-operation with the present independent sector than anything done so far. In such a case, schools that take religious faith seriously would have a special motivation and opportunity.

Newman's fundamental vision of a liberal education, using the word in its proper sense, is as important as ever. Knowledge is its own end with the object of intellectual excellence,[8] and there can be no conflict in principle between religious and scientific truth because 'truth cannot be contrary to truth'. Theology is part of knowledge, and Revelation stands above Reason but does not prevent the proper exercise of reason.

Newman was opposed both to a purely utilitarian idea of education and to a narrow clerical view. We can look back to Newman for a prophetic understanding of the questions that we began to perceive only in the '60s, as we can also look to him for the sense that a school must work with the laity and especially with parents. He carried also, contemporaneously with the great 19th century Anglican schoolmasters, a determination to achieve academic excellence and a deep respect for the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake, something of which we have especial need when a Secretary of State for Education can espouse wholly utilitarian views.

And yet he was as practical as anyone today in accepting the need for standards of education which would equip the young to face the world. Above all, he worked to build trust. At a time when the present system of boarding inspection might be described as founded on prejudice and built on distrust, we have need to be reminded of what a great school must be really about.

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1 This complex of ideas has been summed up in Fr James Hanvey, *On the Way to Life* (Heythrop Institute), pp 12-19
2 James Hanvey op cit, p 13.
3 JH Newman *The Idea of a University* (1907 edition), p 403
4 James Hanvey op cit, p 16
5 James Hanvey, op cit, p 14
6 Newman, *Apologia*, 1897 edition, p 288
7 James Hanvey, op cit, p 45
8 Newman, Idea of a University, 1907, p 121

HERE & THERE

Bawtree inscriptions

David Bawtree, Chairman of Governors at Portsmouth Grammar School, admires a new set of inscriptions on the main arch to the school, which were unveiled recently.

The inscriptions celebrate his contribution to the school in the last decade and the change of purpose for the archway over the last century which, as the entrance to a military barracks in Old Portsmouth, used to be a gateway to war for men but which is now a gateway to learning for girls and boys. This transition is particularly charged for Mr Bawtree, who used to be Flag Officer for Portsmouth.

Science and religion

Fundamentalist Fantasy or Is Dawkins Deluded?

'Scientists animated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study'.
A.N.Whitehead[1].

Fundamentalism can be described as the belief that part of the truth is the whole truth. There is a lot of it about. At one extreme are the religious fundamentalists who may be Creationists believing in a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis, or those who consider that the concept of Intelligent Design by God is to be preferred to the Darwinian theory of evolution.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who maintain that science, and only science, can provide us with reliable knowledge. At first sight, the high profile of these and other extreme views and their growing popularity might seem improbable in this information rich age. But is it precisely because there is so much knowledge available in the world that so many of us are attracted by these simplistic answers to our questions?

According to Robert Hazen, the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss 'identified a deep-seated human tendency to reduce complex situations to oversimplified dichotomies: friend and enemy, heaven and hell, good and evil. The history of science reveals that scientists are not immune to this mindset'.[2] We could add 'You are either with us or against us'.

The more complex and confusing the problem is, the more we are tempted to resort to oversimplification. It seems that we need 'Ein' feste Burg', a safe stronghold, today as much as Luther did 500 years ago.

The mindset of Fundamentalists is interestingly described in *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* by Ralph W Hood et al.[3] and also referred to in John Bowker's remarkable *The Sacred Neuron*[4] which gives a more balanced, scholarly and thoughtful account of the links between science and religion than you ever get in a Dawkins blockbuster.

In the former book the authors describe fundamentalism as 'an intratextual search for meaning'.[5] Put simply this implies a closed, coherent circle of thinking within which the sacred texts, absolute truths and the principal of intratextuality interact, 'intratextual' being a clear reference to the assumption that ultimately the truth is revealed through the sacred texts alone. The circle is strongly defended and is indeed an intellectual 'feste Burg'.

Alternatively, non-fundamentalist thinking is described by means of an 'intertextual' model.[6] In this case the principle of intertextuality maintains that 'no single text speaks for itself'. The 'circle' within which thinking takes place, is 'a broken circle' inside which authoritative texts, relative truths and the principal of intertextuality interact with each other and with other beliefs outside the circle.

"Is Man an Ape or an Angel?"

Those who wish to understand these ideas more deeply, together with John Bowker's concept of coherence, must refer to the books themselves. They are mentioned here to show how readily Scientism fits into the Fundamentalist mindset.

For Christian Fundamentalists, the Bible is clearly the sacred text which must be the final arbiter on all matters. Since it is stated in Genesis that the world was created by God in six days, there can be no argument about the matter. Scientific knowledge lies outside the circle and therefore, if it contradicts the sacred text, must be wrong.

There is a comforting simplicity about this. Intelligent Design is more subtle. Intertextuality with science is accepted, up to a point. Proponents of ID say that they agree with the principle of evolution but insist that scientific explanations are not satisfactory when it comes to explaining certain stages in the evolutionary process. God must have directly intervened. In the USA the word God is sometimes omitted in the hope that the concept might be taught within the science curriculum.

As the full story of evolution is still far from being told, especially when it comes to the evolution of life itself, they might at first sight be said to have a point. But any theory which rests on a 'God of the gaps' concept stands on

HERE & THERE

£4000 raised for Ugandan College

Pictured from left to right are Jayne Hodgkiss, Beth Rudling, Claudia Gilmour and Gabi Ashton.

Two ex-students from Wolverhampton Grammar School are flying to Uganda with a cheque for £4000, hockey sticks, trainers and books.

Beth Rudling and Jayne Hodgkiss, both aged 19 and from Wolverhampton, are travelling to Lords Meade Vocational College in Uganda for a six-month gap year project to help rebuild the main school hall which blew down over the winter months.

Any funds left over will be put towards a new generator to light the girls' dormitories. With the hockey sticks and trainers Beth and Jayne are hoping to introduce the sport into the school. They will both be helping out in the classroom by teaching drama and English and organising a school choir.

The £4000 was raised over the last year by Wolverhampton Grammar School student fundraising efforts such as: crazy hair day, non-uniform days, leg waxing and discos. Beth and Jayne raised a substantial amount of money themselves – this also included a very generous donation by the British and Foreign School Society.

Lords Meade Vocational College has students from across Uganda and Kenya. Many of these are from poverty-stricken backgrounds, and are given full or partial bursaries by Tofta Educational Trust, a registered charity in the UK, USA and Uganda. In a unique link up with the school, two students each year spend six months teaching children at the school during their gap years.

dangerous ground and it is notable that no scientist of international repute, whether he or she belongs to a faith community or not, supports this view.

In the case of Scientism the sacred text is science itself. In *Scientism - Science, Ethics and Religion*, Mickael Stenmark[7] describes with great clarity the different meanings that the concept of Scientism has been given by its advocates and opponents. Under the heading of 'Epistemic Scientism'[8] he quotes Roger Trigg's view that Scientism consists of the view that 'science is our only means of access to reality' and Ian Barbour's definition as the claim that 'the scientific method is the only reliable path to knowledge'.

In support of these definitions he quotes Carl Sagan's 'I am a collection of water, calcium and organic molecules called Carl Sagan. You are a collection of almost identical molecules with a different collective label…' and Francis Crick's claim 'The Astonishing Hypothesis is that "You", your joys and sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased it: 'You're nothing but a pack of neurons'"[9].

To the above quotations we can add Richard Dawkins' 'We are machines built by DNA whose purpose is to make more copies of the same DNA … that is *exactly* what we are for ... It is every living object's sole reason for living.'[10] He adds elsewhere that there is no purpose to be found in the universe, only 'blind, pitiless indifference'.

What is clear is that scientism rests on a form of reductionism, sometimes called 'nothing but-ery'. Reduction is a necessary and essential part of the scientific method. We take things to pieces to find out what they are made of and how they work. This is what scientists do. To take a further step and suggest that the whole is *no more* than the sum of the parts is quite different and is an astonishing hypothesis indeed! In fact the whole is always, yes always, more than the sum of its parts.

It is so obvious that this is the case that one wonders how such apparently intelligent men can make such simplistic errors. Among other things, reductionism makes for very poor science. The idea that we are no more than machines driven by our genes, for instance, ignores the scientifically well-attested influence of the environment on living creatures.

Both nature and nurture make us what we are. The simplistic reductionist view apparently rubbishes a great deal of good science! Like some modern politicians, it seems that the followers of scientism are only interested in headlines.

Another interesting observation about fundamentalists is that they are usually passionate about their beliefs. At first sight this might seem to be more understandable in the case of religious fundamentalists, since faith of its nature requires commitment, than with those who advocate scientism. So why is this the case?

Writing about Leonard Woolf, Victoria Glendinning quotes Virginia on her husband 'He was a passionate, emotional man, and his belief in reason was so intense as to be unreasonable'.[11] Alister McGrath, in his lucid and scholarly *Dawkins' God*[12], points out that the claim that only science can provide us with reliable knowledge cannot itself be tested scientifically. Thus in one blow Dawkins' position is destroyed. His belief in reason is indeed so intense as to be unreasonable.

Not that this has deterred him. His television series *The source of all evil* which attempted to show the universally evil effects of religion was astonishingly selective and his recent book, *The God Delusion*[13] whilst being well written and highly readable, is also superficial and selective.

Take just one example. One problem with the idea that religion is the source of all or, even, most evil and that the world would be a better place without it, was the extreme cruelty of the Communist and Nazi regimes. If religion is the source of so much evil, surely the abolition of all religion in a country will make it a much happier place?

The theme of Dawkins' book is, after all, that religions are fundamentally harmful. He gets round this by saying first that he is always being asked about that (well, he would be, wouldn't he?) and then trying to wriggle out of it. He first implies that there was some Christian influence in Hitler's life and then argues that atheism was not to blame for all the suffering under Stalin because he did not do what he did in the name of atheism!

He ends that chapter with the words 'By contrast, why should anyone go to war for the sake of an absence of belief?'[14], hoping that the reader will move quickly on to the next chapter without noticing that atheism is not an absence of belief, but the belief that there is no God, or wondering if anyone ever went to war for agnosticism, theism or deism.

It is of interest that the word Quaker does not appear in the book. Max Warren[15] used to say ' Take your shoes off when you are talking about other people's faiths, you are treading on holy ground'. By contrast, Dawkins puts the boot in. Alister McGrath's next book, *The Dawkins Delusion,* will be published by the time this article appears and will be essential reading for anyone interested in the debate.

So what should schools do about all this? Today the profile of the science and religion debate is higher than ever before. It is also remarkable that religious education, as a school subject, continues to rise in popularity more rapidly than any other and that, sadly, science subjects continue to decline.

Can it be that our students are reacting against their perception of the implied materialism of science? Some research done in primary schools by a Farmington Fellow in the 1990s showed, not surprisingly, that RE was the most popular subject in the school when taught through discussion and the least when taught as a series of facts to be learnt by heart.

This debate, when taught through open-minded and informed discussion has been shown to be very popular in both primary and secondary schools during trials of the materials produced by the Science and Religion in Schools project.

The project has been funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. Unlike many educational projects, this one is 'ongoing' in that the use of 'print on demand' technology and CD ROMs allows constant and inexpensive updating. Those who buy the Guides are invited to take part in a continuing process of development. In this way the project will keep in touch with all schools that use it. For further details see www.srsp.net

One of the remarkable characteristics of the science and religion debate is how deeply it is concerned with the human personality. We all have to balance our intuition and imagination with our rationality, not always a comfortable exercise.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the debate is not confined to the West but is essentially global. Schools, unlike universities, continue to be deeply rooted in their local cultures. So, whereas the principles of the debate can clearly be internationalised, the way it is approached in schools in different countries must necessarily vary.

In countries like the USA, for instance, where religious education can only be taught in church schools, there are particular difficulties, but in most parts of the world the interest is there and it is to be hoped that work will soon start on developing materials for use in schools around the world.

There will continue to be controversy, but those concerned with schools should ensure that, in the schools where they have influence, the debate between the claims of science and those of the world's major religions are conducted in an informed and open-minded manner. Those who see the universe as blind, are concerned about its pitilessness and passionate about its indifference, do indeed constitute an interesting subject for study.

Martin Rogers

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Food in schools

Geoffrey Harrison, who runs his own catering company, and Sheena Fowkes, food development manager at Chartwells, are amongst those in the front line of an educational issue even more controversial than GCSE coursework

Geoffrey Harrison: Historically, state school meals were heavily subsidised by local authorities, keeping the cost to parents artificially low. Few parents would have realised that what they were paying for a school meal did not cover the true cost. Over the past 20 years or so, the subsidy provided by local authorities has been gradually removed.

At the same time, pressure has been placed on school meal providers to keep the cost to parents low. Meanwhile customers – pupils – have other options, such as bringing in packed lunches. Schools no longer have a captive market, a significant issue in such a volume-sensitive business.

Geoff 'n' Chef.

The challenge has been to attract and retain customers, but how? Many school meals providers responded to the changed environment by emulating high street fast-food outlets. Menus became dependent on burgers, pizzas and, more recently, the notorious Turkey Twizzler. Simultaneously, society's eating habits began to change, with the rise of 'grazing', snacking and convenience foods.

It is notoriously difficult to motivate children to eat healthily: ill-health 40 or more years hence seems far removed from a child's everyday life. However, it may not be this long before today's children experience the effects of poor diets. An increasing body of scientific evidence, mainly derived from studies of children who miss breakfast, suggests that the poor diet enjoyed by many children may be undermining their concentration and academic performance. It may even shorten their lives: doctors and nutritionists predict that the rapidly increasing rates of obesity seen in young people will result in an epidemic of diabetes, heart disease and other disorders.

Sheena Fowkes: I agree. Encouraging children to choose an apple over a bag of crisps is not an impossible task but it is a serious responsibility, especially at a time when an extraordinary number of children with poor eating habits are suffering from diet-related health problems.

Schools and caterers who work together have a huge opportunity to influence youngsters' perceptions and experience of 'healthy food' by creating the right environment. Bearing in mind that about one quarter of a child's life is spent at school, well-coordinated efforts to foster a healthy approach towards eating can help young people enjoy a varied, wholesome diet well beyond their school days.

We must present healthy foods imaginatively and develop creative and innovative ways to get children interested in eating the right kind of foods at mealtimes. Forcing children to make healthy choices or being prescriptive about what they eat is a sure way to turn them off: the message we want to convey is, yes, eating a variety of fresh, well-prepared foods is good for you, but it's also exciting and enjoyable.

GH: The concern about the predominance of heavily processed foods on school menus is nothing new. A lot of people have been worried about it for some time, just as some of us have been happily concentrating on cooking good fresh food for years. But Jamie Oliver has certainly got the sparks flying. Unfortunately, the government's efforts have been fairly typical of knee-jerk responses: sentiment sound, outcome flawed.

The new menu standards that came into effect in September may not have quite the intended effect. Where menus change radically, children may opt to bring a packed lunch from home. What is the point of applying a mandatory regime to school meals and leaving out lunch boxes? The result in many places may be both a failure to meet the nutritional standard and the loss of a paying customer – a lose-lose situation.

This already seems to be happening. Guilty or not, school meal providers as a whole have been tarred and Turkey Twizzler-feathered by the public. The poor image of school meals, many people believe, has resulted in a reduction of between 12-15% in meal numbers – putting even more financial pressure on service providers. The government has begun to realise that school meals are not going to be an easy win.

For example, it has watered down its idea of insisting that a hot meal be provided in every school. Perhaps someone pointed out that vast numbers of schools ceased providing a hot meal years ago and that classrooms have taken the place of kitchens. In any case, we should not leave everything to schools. Pre-school nutritional education is important too.

Perhaps we should explore linking nutrition with cooking as early in life as possible? The future is not all bleak. Good things are being done; many children are beginning to take a

Devine diet at Sutton Valence

Sutton Valence, which caters for boys and girls aged three to 18, took strategic steps more than two years ago to ensure students were given suitable brain fodder and fewer sugary, pre-packed foods and snacks, following requests from the students themselves for more healthy options.

"A lot of the changes we made were actually in response to our students' requests. They came to us and asked for more fresh fruit, vegetables and salads – and we were delighted to oblige. One of the challenges in providing food for young people is striking a balance between what they like and what is healthy. To find our students enjoy eating healthy food is a real bonus!" says catering manager John Devine.

Today, the tuck shop – a popular favourite with all ages at morning and afternoon break – no longer stocks crisps, fizzy drinks or confectionery. Instead, students can choose from filled rolls, dried and fresh fruit and smoothies, while water fountains are located in the students' dayrooms.

"We realised a long time ago that there were hidden dangers lurking in fast food and snacks, and made a concerted effort to eliminate them from both the tuck shop and the kitchens," says Mr Devine.

In order to deliver their healthy eating programme, Sutton Valence employs five qualified chefs who serve up three varied meals a day to the school's 500 day pupils and boarders. For breakfast, there is a wide range of cereals and fruit, with both English and continental options to follow.

An extensive salad bar, with more than 20 different dishes, is a firm favourite at lunchtime and in the evening, when students have a choice of five main courses, followed by a dessert or trip to the 'yoghurt factory,' which offers a range of flavours with fruit and other assorted toppings.

The school encourages healthy eating through its PSHE programme, with the aid of schools packs produced by the British Heart Foundation. It also aims to 'buy local' whenever possible, given the constraints of seasonal production, and almost always from suppliers within Europe.

"Our priority is always to offer a healthy, varied diet, using produce which hasn't travelled thousands of miles," says Mr Devine. "Meat, fish and vegetables are sourced locally whenever possible and always cooked freshly on site. On the whole, we find our students thrive, have more energy and display greater levels of concentration."

greater interest in what they eat. Cooking what they eat works wonders with young children, extending their 'flavour bank' and stimulating their interest in food. "Try this" is much more exciting than "don't eat that".

SF: Children are more inclined to alter their eating habits if they are given regular opportunities to taste, explore and experiment with food in stimulating ways. For example, our school catering teams often hold tasting sessions where pupils can sample new foods at break time or during lunchtime.

They also work with teaching staff on interactive learning activities such as hands-on cookery sessions where youngsters experiment with fruits and vegetables and make their own juice blends, smoothies or fruit salads. On a grander scale, the whole school might get involved in a food quiz, designing a sandwich or a cooking event along the lines of *Ready, Steady, Cook*.

Schools and catering teams should ensure that parents and governors are involved as well, so that the whole school offers a consistent and positive environment within which children

may develop healthy eating habits. Schools can also take advantage of opportunities in their local communities such as farm and market visits, so that pupils acquire a better understanding of the connections between the food they eat, the raw materials they see in the shops, the land on which the food is grown and the people who produce it.

GH: Is there a 'blue skies' answer to the challenge of children's diets? Probably not. The solution is just to keep the process of thoughtful improvements going: better menus, better nutritional education and, above all, better eating experiences for children.

A whole school approach is vital, with the headteacher's support crucial in promoting pupil and parental involvement. The results could be surprising. Anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that improvements in the quality of school lunches lead to improvements in behaviour and learning. This area is now being investigated through a systematic review of the available research, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency.

SF: Well-prepared, nutritionally-balanced meals supported by hands-on activities in the classroom, kitchen, farm or market, help to make eating and trying new foods fun and interesting for children. Every aspect of school life – from the dining hall to the classroom to the tuck shop – should inspire children to make sound food choices and to enjoy eating a well-balanced diet.

GH: And, in case you think that this article is not relevant to the readers of *Conference & Common Room*, since the new menu standards will form part of OFSTED inspections, how long before the independent school sector is under the grill too?

Hot Dogs and Englishmen

In the heat of the midday sun, John Price takes an international view on school food

Once a term the School Food Committee meets in my office with the General Manager of the Empire Hotel and Country Club, the seven star establishment – I am not joking – which provides our catering.

School meals are popular at JIS, particularly when the chocolate truffle cake served at High Tea on Sundays in the hotel, finds its way to the school canteen for Monday morning break. (High Tea at the Empire (about 7 quid) makes Afternoon Tea at the Ritz (about 40 quid?) look like a cup cake, a cream slice and a pot of Liptons on the pier at Weston.)

I have no idea whether the deep fried chilli prawns with mayonnaise dip and cheeky crème patissière vol-au-vents that are delivered to my office before board meetings are also served in the canteen, nor, in all honesty, do I care, but the little darlings certainly don't do badly. I wonder what Prue Leith would make of it all. There's not a hint of Turkey Twizzler.

It is true that the Head Girl, who is Burmese, argues regularly for more sushi, particularly the rolls with the translucent sliver of ahi on top or those delicate albacore maki with glistening red salmon roe, fresh from the rivers of Hokkaido. Wai, a charming local Chinese girl, usually questions the quality of the dim sum, but is informed that they are identical to those served in the Empire Li Gong Restaurant with its views across the sea to Labuan.

The son of the Third Secretary at the British High Commission on the other hand argues for more burgers. "The burgers always run out before I get there. Can't stand all that chicken and rice stuff. Can't we have fish fingers?" Sigh. Even the Aussies are more imaginative. "Do you think we could have a barbie from time to time?" Perhaps it is a British thing?

Surely Prue, as the new Food Tsar, can give us something healthy that Brits will like. For goodness sake, she looks like someone's mum. The wide boy from Clavering has galvanised the Government and put the wind up the multi-nationals; Prue must now come up with good home cooking.

After all, she started out cooking business lunches: city boys can't be so different from the lads at Holgate School in Nottingham, where this week it's pork korma, turkey and vegetable pie and braised steak with Yorkshire pudding and gravy. Sounds OK, particularly backed up by her stony glare. Chips just on Fridays. Da zdravstvuyet Velikaya Prudyence.

What about nice meat pies with vegetables? Hungarian goulash or Yorkshire hotpot? I'm sure I used to like that at school when it wasn't spam fritters. Out here in the tropics it's nasi lemak (rice cooked in coconut milk) we have to wean them off; have that for breakfast every day and you soon look like Robbie Coltrane.

His Majesty, the Sultan of Brunei has got the right idea. He regularly leads walkathons, in which Ministers, CEOs of major banks and school principals are encouraged to take part. One is subjected to the humiliation of seeing oneself on television, panting and gasping, as our super fit head of state disappears over the horizon and the sun sinks behind the palm trees.

John Price is Principal of Jerudong International School, Brunei.

The essence of good government

Brian Greenwood, who has been a school governor for nearly 50 years, explains what constitutes the ideal board

I have long held the view that regular reading of *Conference & Common Room* would help many school governors and therefore I found John Dunford's article on Governors and Governance in the January issue particularly interesting.

However, he cast his observations over the whole field of governance, both the maintained and independent sectors and mentioned all sizes of schools. I hope it might now be helpful to narrow the focus and consider only the governance of independent schools.

It is my firm belief that the secret of success for a governing body thereof is that it is well-balanced. By this I mean that all the appropriate groups – including, in the modern jargon, 'stakeholders' – are adequately represented and with a reasonable balance in the numbers in each category. I suggest that a sensible categorisation of governors would include the following:

Former pupils
Current and former parents
Academics
Businessmen or women (if possible from varied commercial backgrounds including property)
Professional men and women – and this can be sub-divided into at least the law, the medical professions and accountancy
Churchmen and women
People with a musical and/or theatrical background
People with a sporting background.

Two categories sometimes found on governing bodies are conspicuous by their absence from the list above – staff-representative governors or pupil-representative governors. Those absences are quite deliberate. The point has had full consideration at Woodhouse Grove over many years and we have found that a significant involvement in the school's management by members of the staff can be happily and easily contrived just as useful input from pupils can be arranged. Given such arrangements staff or pupil governors are an emphatic No-No.

The categories set out above must, of course, include an appropriate gender balance and ideally a wide age range. Arranging an appropriate gender balance is usually not a problem but arranging a wide age spread usually is. There are few problems in finding governors at the upper end of the age scale; the difficulty lies in securing the services of young professional and business people who are nearing the peak of their careers at the time you would like to recruit them.

I believe the size of a governing body should be between 14 and 20. With fewer than 14 governors it would be very difficult to have representation of the categories suggested. Once the total passes 20 there is a tendency for board meetings to be too large and unwieldy, given that normally several members of staff – the head, deputy head, bursar, finance manager, head of junior school, chaplain and possibly others might be required to be in attendance.

I hope it will be interesting to you to read a breakdown of the current governing body at Woodhouse Grove, where we are fairly close to having a well-balanced board. Our present board consists of 18, 14 men and four women. Obviously gender balance presently is not good enough.

We have five former pupils, ten current or former parents. As academics, we have three former heads. We have eight businessmen, two accountants, two judges and three magistrates, one cleric, one doctor and two educational administrators. That list, of course, adds up to more than 18, since some governors cover two or three categories – for example, one governor can be a former pupil, past parent and local businessman.

Although we are a Methodist foundation and proud of it, the religious denominations of our governors are Methodist seven, Methodist/C of E two, C of E five, Roman Catholics three, Quaker one. Our age range is from the early forties to the late seventies. We believe a wide age range is desirable.

We do not have a fixed retiring age, but Governors serve for three yearly terms and a recent innovation is that after nine years a Governor should leave the board for a year unless he or she were chairman or vice-chairman of the full board, or chairman of any of the governors' committees and working parties.

Requirements

What qualities should be sought in any governor regardless of the category into which he or she falls? The first must surely be integrity, followed by considerations such as sympathy with independent education, confidentiality, an enquiring and questioning mind and a willingness to be actively involved in the school's governance. The last point is important.

In days now, I think, long gone, it was enough for a governor to attend a termly meeting and one or two major school functions and that was all. Nowadays, with the ever-increasing complexity of school governance, I believe it is essential that every governor has at least one specific responsibility. At WGS, all governors serve on at least one committee or working party. A further factor in striving for a well-balanced board is the need to have several governors in reasonably close proximity to the school.

Where and how to find them

It is helpful if a permanent governors' committee responsible for appointments, nominations and governance issues is in place. Such a committee would look first to the former pupils' association for possible governors. Members thereof who have been actively involved in that association's management have clearly demonstrated their on-going interest in the school. Over the years most of our former pupil governors have been involved in the Old 'Grovian Association.

Similarly the parents' association of the senior school, and junior school if any, is the obvious place to look first for parents who have already demonstrated an interest in the school beyond their own children's position.

The officers and ex-officers of our parents' associations have proved to be good governors, particularly so if their profession

or business background also fills a need. The pool of knowledge around the boardroom table constantly provides names for the nominations committee to consider, but in the final analysis the most helpful source of suggested names is the head.

Apart from the head's obvious knowledge of current and past parents and former pupils, he or she will frequently be able to suggest the names of others from the academic world. Indeed, a shrewd head will, over a number of years, end up with a governing body containing quite a large proportion of people he or she originally suggested.

Obviously it is for the nominations committee, and later the full board itself, to ensure that this particular card is not overplayed and that the board is never overfilled with the head's personal contacts. Ideally, the nominations committee should always have several potential governors in mind representing several different categories.

There is a case for taking particular care as regards the appointment of governors who are current parents. We take the view that those of our governors who are parents have joined the board because of other qualities which we believe will be helpful to us but who are, incidentally as it were, and almost as a bonus, parents with children in the school.

We need to know the parental point of view, but what we most definitely do not want are parent-governors who might be obsessed with what are really school management matters rather than governance issues.

Generally it is not difficult to find and maintain a good and reasonably well-balanced board, save for the difficulty already referred to, of recruiting younger people. What is perhaps more difficult is bringing governorships to an end at the optimum time.

I believe that the alleged danger of having elderly governors who have outstayed their usefulness is very much less significant than is often suggested. Quite obviously a board composed entirely of the old would be anything but well-balanced, but allowing, say, one or even two elderly, long-serving governors who are reluctant to depart to stay on a little beyond their normal sell-by date is, frankly, no big deal. The benefit to be had from such a person's long experience is likely to more than compensate for the fact that he or she may be slowing down mentally and physically.

In the final analysis, I take the view that a competent chairman should be capable of having an appropriate private word with a long-serving colleague when the time has clearly come for them to depart with grateful thanks.

Appointment and induction

With a board of the size suggested there should never be any desperate urgency to appoint a new governor. If the nomination and appointments committee does its job properly, retirements will have been anticipated and a choice of possible successors will have been made available to the full board with ample time for consideration spread, if necessary, over two or even more termly meetings.

The induction and training of new governors is, I think, a separate subject to which the editor may wish to see this magazine return. For the present I will simply say that induction should be a pleasant welcoming process with ample reading matter, school visits and a mentoring situation.

As for training, some is necessary but beware of having new governors feel that they must carry in their heads a mass of detail about legal obligations, charity provisions, risk assessment criteria, examination procedures, *etc*. The new – and existing – governors will always have available to them skilled technical advice from the head, the bursar, their colleagues and, of course, the professional associations.

Brian Greenwood has a lifetime connection with Woodhouse Grove School where he was once the youngest pupil. He was appointed governor in 1959, vice-chairman in 1964 and has served as chairman since 1969. He anticipates – DV – continuing as chairman until Autumn 2009 so as to complete 40 years in that position.

HERE & THERE

Bishop's Stortford College student wins Excellence in Geography Award

A Bishop's Stortford College A level student has received a Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) award for Excellence in Geography. Lucy Stapleton achieved the best results in the country in the OCR exam board's GCE A level Geography examination last summer.

The award scheme promotes the interest and enjoyment of Geography by recognising and rewarding high achievers in A level and GCSE examinations. It is always appreciated by students, parents and schools when the highest examination achievements are rewarded, and to have that achievement recognised by the national learned society for the subject elevates the achievement further.

Steve Brace, Head of Education and Outdoor Learning at the RGS-IBG said "The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) was delighted to give Lucy an award for her achievement as one of this year's best Geography students."

Diplomatic initiatives

Geoff Lucas explains why the independent sector should become involved with Specialised Diplomas, despite their early lack of enthusiasm

It has been billed as the most ambitious educational initiative in the world. It starts in 2008. By 2013, every young person in England will have an entitlement to one. And it's coming to a centre (or centres) near you!

While many readers will already have guessed what exactly 'it' is, few in the independent sector will have given much thought as yet to what the launch of 'Specialised Diplomas' will mean for them, for other independent schools, or for the national system of education as a whole in England.

Still fewer, when they know what is involved, are likely to rush to sign up for Diplomas, even in areas like ICT where staff expertise and prior experience of vocational qualifications exist. Why is this and does it matter?

First, some background to this initiative. Specialised Diplomas were born out of the government's rejection of the Tomlinson report for a national system of unified Diplomas covering both academic and vocational learning. Although they are broadly vocational in focus, Specialised Diplomas are not vocationally-specific (in the way that apprenticeships are) and all will include a core of 'general' education, including:

- the generic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT (or 'functional skills' as they are now called);
- personal learning and thinking skills;
- an extended project;
- work experience.

Specialist learning will equip young people with in-depth understanding of a particular vocational subject area. So far, 14 vocational subject areas (or 'lines of learning') are planned; but a fifteenth area, 'science', has now also been approved and, long term, many believe that other, less vocational subject areas, might follow. The first five subject areas due to be piloted from September 2008 are:

- construction and the built environment;
- health and social care;
- ICT;
- creative arts and media;
- engineering.

In September 2009, a further five Diplomas – land-based and environmental studies; manufacturing; hair and beauty; business administration; and finance and hospitality – will be available, followed in September 2010 by the next four – public services; sport and leisure; retail; and travel and tourism. (There is, at present, no timetable for science.)

Turning back to the independent sector, what are the prospects for take-up of any of these new Diplomas? In the last survey of vocational qualifications in independent schools some two years ago, only 28% of schools were offering any vocational qualifications at all. In rank order, the top five reasons for the low take-up were:

- a perceived lack of currency in Higher Education;
- negative parental attitudes;

"I'm really looking forward to meeting the Prime Minister's new Diplomas Tsar."

- the cost and resource implications;
- the low status accorded to VQs in media coverage/league tables;
- negative staff attitudes.

Many of these reasons are likely to be shared by maintained schools that offer a mainly academic diet of GCSEs and A levels. Moreover, changes over the last two years, including the renaming and increasing academic drift of GNVQs/vocational/applied A levels, appear to have done nothing to counter these obstacles to take-up. If anything, things have become worse.

The most recent survey of qualifications offered in independent schools, undertaken by ISC at the end of 2006, found that three quarters of schools were either not aware of Diplomas or not interested in them. Of the quarter that were 'interested in principle' (some 97 schools), only one claimed to be 'likely to offer' any of the Diplomas and even this later turned out to be an error! None said they would definitely offer Diplomas.

Looking ahead, it is difficult to see what will have changed, even by 2013 when all 14 Diplomas are available nationally, to reduce the above barriers to take-up. If anything, the

obstacles will be even greater. This is down to two main reasons.

First, Diplomas are group awards. Like the IB, the Welsh Bac and Scottish group awards, the overall Diploma is only awarded for the achievement of all its constituent parts. Although partial achievement of a Diploma at level 3 may be recognised by a two A level equivalent called a 'progression award', the full Diploma (equivalent to three full A levels) will be needed for progression to a first degree in higher education.

Unlike vocational or applied A levels, it will be virtually impossible for students to take a Diploma alongside a traditional academic programme of study of three A levels. It is simply too big. (It will, however, be possible for Diploma students to include an AS or an A level as part of their Diploma; for example, physics A level as part of an Engineering Diploma.)

Second, the 'delivery' model for Diplomas requires collaboration, ideally with an FE College and/or training provider with experience of offering vocational courses. All Diplomas will also require links with employers to provide the mandatory ten days work experience in a relevant, professional setting.

Even for maintained schools, Specialised Diplomas are going to be a challenge. The recent report by LEACAN (the national network for inspectors, advisers and officers responsible for 14-19 planning and development) must have made gloomy reading for ministers and civil servants who have designed the implementation model for Diplomas around collaboration. According to LEACAN:

- most vocational provision pre-16 is not delivered through collaboration;
- there is little evidence of post-16 collaboration to deliver vocational qualifications;
- on average only two or three lines of learning are currently available to learners;
- there is little strategic planning for staff development;
- the key barrier to implementation is the attitude/willingness of schools.

Against such a background, it is little wonder that the Prime Minister is reported to want a 'diploma tsar' to oversee this complex initiative, described at the end of last year by the *Sunday Telegraph* as 'riddled with problems'. Even QCA has flagged Diplomas as 'red risk', the highest of its four risk categories.

If collaboration within the maintained sector is tricky, collaboration between the maintained and independent sectors is likely to be even more ambitious, particularly when the focus is on vocational education. The expectation that delivery will be shared with a school or college with vocational experience and expertise raises another thorny issue for independent schools.

One particularly hard-nosed question cannot be ducked: how many parents will be prepared to pay independent school fees for their child to be educated post-16 partly, if not mainly, in the local maintained sector school or college?

Whatever groupings of institutions and employers result from collaborative arrangements, the consequential risk that not all students and parents will be pleased with the prospect of part of the course being delivered outside their current school will at best make independent schools cautious.

The absence of independent schools from any of the initial expressions of interest by local consortia to offer the first five Diplomas from 2008 is therefore hardly surprising. But if the next stage of the 'gateway process' for approving bids to offer Diplomas also excludes independent schools, Diplomas will remain the preserve of maintained schools and colleges. To anyone who believes in bridging the academic/vocational divide, as well as long-term social cohesion and harmony, this should matter.

Unless the independent sector engages with Diplomas, and is actively encouraged to do so by local consortia and the DfES, the prospect of an even more divided and polarised education system in this country will be only too real. This threat is already present in the form of the IGCSE and Cambridge Pre-U which, if not recognised by DfES and open to all schools and colleges, will drive a further wedge between the sectors.

Moreover, for some young people in independent schools (not all of which, contrary to popular belief, are academically selective), a Specialised Diploma might be a better choice for progression to employment or higher education than a wholly academic diet of A levels.

If 'personalised learning' means anything at all, it must mean matching the most appropriate choice of curricula and qualifications to a young person's needs and aptitudes. For some learners, in whatever sector, this will mean a more applied or broadly vocational choice.

If independent schools truly believe this, then maybe there is a way forward. For example, why don't the few independent schools who are interested exert their independence? Why don't they explore the delivery of some lines of learning without collaboration and simply make arrangements for those lines of learning which can be practically delivered?

Independent schools can afford to be robust in maintaining standards and have certain freedoms not enjoyed by maintained schools (*eg* to employ people direct from business, industry and commerce, without QTS) which are positively beneficial in this context.

Take-up of Specialised Diplomas by the independent sector, albeit modest in the early years, is essential if the government's 14-19 reforms are to succeed. This is not said in a spirit of inflated self-importance on the part of what is, after all, only a small part of overall national education provision. It is because the influence of the sector on public perceptions far outweighs its actual size. A parallel could be drawn with the Russell Group of universities.

Recognition by these institutions of Diplomas will send a very powerful signal to young people and society that Diplomas have both credibility and currency. Like it or not, take-up by independent schools will provide an equally powerful stamp of endorsement.

For Diplomas to have a proper and respected place in 14-19 provision, alongside traditional academic qualifications, they will need to be available and attractive to all young people, irrespective of the institution or sector they come from.

Geoff Lucas is Secretary of HMC.

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Does size matter?

Yes it does, both for better and for worse, says Kenneth Greig

When headteachers meet for the first time and talk about their respective schools, there invariably comes a point in the conversation when the question is asked "how many pupils do you have?" We feel, I think, that the size of the school underpins everything and numbers give us a framework for further understanding of what sort of job a colleague may have.

No doubt most of us feel that the current size of our school is about right – despite what governors on the finance committee may think – but there is often a sense when meeting the head of a very large school that they are somehow to be envied, or pitied, or both.

Evidently size matters, with the bigger schools having a kind of educational weight and muscle that smaller schools tend to look up to. Becoming head of a large school is usually seen as a significant career move. Perhaps that is because it is usually assumed that greater pupil numbers make the job intrinsically more difficult. Is that actually the case?

Sir Eric Anderson, in his speech to the Manchester conference, picked out size as one crucial factor in the success of a school, linking size to ethos and the all-important shared understanding of what the school stands for. I agree that there is probably an optimum size, but is a larger school more difficult to manage?

Having been Headmaster of Pangbourne – a school with around 380 pupils – I am now Rector of Hutchesons' in Glasgow with around 1800, so I have seen both ends of the HMC numbers spectrum. Comparing the two schools is not easy, as they also sit far apart in ethos. Pangbourne is a boarding school in leafy Berkshire, with naval traditions reinforcing a modern whole-child approach.

Hutchesons' is a city day school best known for its high academic standards, with an MGS-like commitment to social diversity through financial support. The difference in teaching staff numbers between the two schools reflects the pupil number difference, with 45 teachers at Pangbourne and 190 at Hutchesons'. Similar proportions apply to the numbers of support staff and to the annual financial turnover, as you might expect, although the latter is softened by the fact that fees at Hutchesons' are only around a third of those at Pangbourne.

One of the things that surprised me most when I started at Hutchesons' was that there appeared to be many teaching and support staff carrying out job responsibilities that I was used to doing myself or would have allocated as part of a portfolio to other senior managers. In a small school, heads know that most senior teachers will have at least two or three other areas of responsibility in the school, over and above their main management and teaching loads.

Recruitment time is always difficult, and anxious negotiations take place each year as the tapestry of who does what is unpicked and gradually sewn back together again in a

new form. There are some colleagues who, over the passage of years, have carved out a mixture of responsibilities that is so heterogeneous that if they leave it is unreasonable to ask only one person to pick it all up.

This difficulty applies to appointing relatively inexperienced staff too. Who running a small boarding school has not despaired of ever finding a young, single, new appointee who is prepared to live-in as a house tutor – and teach physics?

By contrast, in a large school, co-ordinating and running the school calendar of events is a full-time job for one person. You really do need a team of seven to run the computer network effectively and cope with all the technology changes and the development ideas. You have so many former pupils that one person in the development office can spend most of their time updating the database and replying to emails.

For senior teachers, compiling exam entries and results, arranging internal exams, sorting out class cover, managing risk assessments for trips, liaising with prefects, talking to pupils about career choice and UCAS forms all have to be done by different individuals because they are all large, complicated and time-consuming tasks.

At Hutchesons', several of these types of job have moved out from under the wings of deputy heads (even though there are five in the senior school alone) to subject teachers where they are done willingly and well. In fact, there is a clamour amongst staff for involvement which is difficult to satisfy. When I asked a year ago for someone willing to take on writing the timetable, I had ten applications, and any assistant head of year post will have a dozen at least.

At Pangbourne I was often asking an already busy person to take on one extra bit of management. At Hutchesons' there are not enough management tasks to satisfy all the people who want to do more than just teach.

So in some ways managing a large school is functionally simpler, because there is a good supply of willing people, and when one cog leaves, another can be easily slotted in. But such devolution of responsibilities brings different challenges.

In a small school the person who wants to check who is free to take a fieldtrip and what the best day for it would be, and who would cover the lessons in their absence, often only has to speak to one person, who has all the knowledge at their fingertips. In a large school there is a careful trail of paper or emails checking round maybe ten or more people, or else chaos ensues, and tempers are raised.

The biggest challenge I have found in a large school is, perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, communication. I have moved from a school where I knew all the staff and their families, and all the pupils and their families, to one where after a year I hardly feel I know the teaching staff well enough yet, and I still see pupils in the corridors who I am sure I have not set eyes on before. I'm finding it difficult even to meet a large section of the parent body, never mind get to know them.

I have had to approach this fundamental part of the job – of getting to know the whole community and of letting them get to know me – very differently, with a whole range of carefully planned tactics as opposed to the gradual, more haphazard way that it happened at Pangbourne, because after only a few months at Hutchesons' I realised that unless I did so, I was never going to know a critical mass at all.

I have shamelessly pinched good ideas from fellow heads of larger schools, for example sitting in on a whole lesson each day and having a follow-up half hour with the teacher two days later (thanks, Angus). This works because it hits more than one target at once, and I am finding that I am looking for ways of doing something similar in a whole range of areas of management.

Sitting in the classes I get to see the teacher teach and the pupils learn, and so both know I am in touch with them and what they are doing. It also gives me an unprecedented knowledge of learning and teaching across the whole school – something very much worth having in a school which has academic excellence as its main aim.

I think I also speak more regularly to the whole school and to the whole staff than I did at Pangbourne, partly because I have more assemblies, but partly because I feel a need to keep doing so. In a small school, word of mouth passed round important news and ideas quickly, whereas in a large school I am conscious of the more distant tributaries silting up if they are not regularly dredged.

Having experienced both extremes, I think that small and large schools represent a fairly equal challenge to any head, in terms of their management. Although the difference of scale presents a different set of problems in a larger school, I have more of the resources on hand, human and financial, to help me solve them.

The bread and butter task of articulating a clear vision for the school and making sure that it reaches all parts of the community remains the same, it is only the way in which that is achieved which is different.

I was struck by the passage in Martin Stephen's speech as chairman at the St Andrews conference where he praised heads of small schools, trying to dispel the myth that the best heads are necessarily heads of large schools. I'm sure he's right. Pupil numbers make the job different but they should not necessarily be a badge of success, either for the school, or for the head.

Dr Kenneth Greig is Rector of Hutchesons' Grammar School, Glasgow.

HERE & THERE

Haileybury becomes the UK's latest export to Kazakhstan

Haileybury has signed an agreement with Kazakhstan-based international developers Capital Partners to develop a school reflecting Haileybury's values in the city of Almaty in Kazakhstan.

Haileybury-Almaty will be the first British independent school to open in Central Asia, further expanding the global trend for the export of British schooling. Building began in May 2007 on a greenfield site located centrally in Almaty on Al Farabi Avenue on the banks of the Esentai river. Haileybury-Almaty will welcome its first pupils in September 2008.

Pulling the plug on plagiarism

Coursework shouldn't be sacrificed because of copying from the internet, argues James Priory, when even sacred texts emerge from a culture of cut and paste

Plagiarism has never been easier than it is today. At least that is the claim made at www.plagiarism.org, a website dedicated to those in education concerned by the growth in student cheating.

Plagiarism, it reports, has spawned a multi-million pound industry in which ready-made essays have been known to change hands for four figure sums. The anti-plagiarism industry is also doing quite nicely: according to Universities UK, over 80% of institutions use the electronic software Turnitin, which uses ISBN numbers and a database of on-line resources to send out an alert if copies are made of previously published material.

On-line plagiarism has fuelled concern over the authenticity of pupils' coursework and led to a general shake-up of GCSE from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Coursework has already disappeared from Maths and from September 2009 will fade too from GCSE Business Studies, Classical subjects, Economics, English Literature, Geography, History, Modern Languages, Religious Studies and Social Sciences. Instead, coursework will be carried out in the classroom in controlled assessments.

Shadow Higher Education Minister Boris Johnson waded into the debate, like King Canute it seemed, in late 2006. "We should be encouraging people to be intellectually adventurous," he growled. "Instead we are creating a place where … it's safer to lift something or to buy it in."

The Secretary of State for Education Alan Johnson was in stern mood too: "We cannot have one of the most rigorous exam systems in the world devalued and undermined by the few who cheat by copying it from the internet."

Teachers have become expert in identifying likely cases of plagiarised work. If I had chosen not to declare my source in the opening paragraph, no doubt suspicious Common Room members would have Googled the first sentence and swiftly denounced the article as a nasty case of cut and paste. "Elementary, my dear Watson," they might think, only to recoil with horror at the idea of repeating someone else's words.

But plagiarism is not always that simple. Conan Doyle, for instance, never wrote the expression "Elementary, my dear Watson". In the original stories Holmes remarks "Exactly" rather than the arch 'Elementary' coined later on film. Instead of dismissing his pupil's admiration, the sleuth recognises his secretary's struggle to understand and rewards him with affirmation.

In the rush to reject technology and to condemn the act of imitation in pupils' work, there is a danger that we confuse the real thing – valuable skills of scholarship and creativity – with the imitation – unacknowledged theft of another person's ideas and words.

And in denouncing the whole enterprise of exchange and allusion, it could be said that we run the risk of losing pupil confidence in knowing how to use what they read, and possibly even whether they should read on-line at all. Turnitin could easily become turnitoff.

The media debate about plagiarism last year was exacerbated by a spate of high profile allegations in the arts world. Damien Hirst was accused of borrowing the mathematical design of a spiral dot painting, *Valium*, from a text book design itself inspired by the biological geometry of a daisy; Dan Brown took the witness stand in the High Court in London over allegations of copyright infringement in his global bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* (he won the case); and most notably Ian McEwan faced the charge of plagiarising Lucilla Andrew's autobiography *No Time For Romance* in his novel *Atonement*.

Despite acknowledging Andrews as a non-fiction source to which he was 'indebted', McEwan was subjected to media scrutiny, including a three-page feature in the *Mail on Sunday* and the front page of *The Guardian*. Writers and commentators were swift to come to his defence, however, citing Shakespeare as the master plagiarist and quoting T S Eliot's observation that 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal'.

Our fixation with the idea of originality has been with us since the Romantics first strode the hills. After all, the mountain top is supposed to be a solitary place, making original expression somewhat mandatory; and if the emotions inspired by the ascent are authentic then their expression should be spontaneous, even if a little re-drafting or recollection in tranquillity is allowed.

The irony is that Wordsworth and Coleridge participated in one of literature's most fertile collaborations, their poems layered with echoes of each other's expressions, whilst Wordsworth's most personal work, *The Prelude*, remained unpublished in his lifetime.

Art thrives on dialogue and interaction, the transformation of the familiar into something strange and new. Much of the interest generated by art centres on issues of identity and ownership. Mozart's *Requiem* may be evocative of its composer's own death but was probably commissioned by Count Walsegg-Stupach to be passed off as his own composition in memory of his wife.

Thomas Hardy allowed his autobiography to masquerade as recollections from his former secretary and second wife Florence. W B Yeats went even further; with the cooperation of his wife George Hyde Lees as a medium, the Irish poet experimented in automatic writing to produce his occult work *A Vision*.

It is hard to imagine how an examination board would deal with such cases when the very idea of an author or composer refuses to be strictly singular. And from synoptic modules to

synoptic gospels, the moral concern with authenticity is not helped by remembering that even sacred texts emerge from a culture of cut and paste.

There has long been a consensus amongst theologians that the writers of Luke and Matthew used Mark's account on which to base their narrative as well as an unidentified source known simply as 'Q'.

On a recent trip to Leiden to research the university education of the founder of Portsmouth Grammar School for a new history, our archivist was shocked to discover the possibility that the former city mayor and Physician to the Garrison, William Smith MD, may have bought his doctoral thesis from his Leiden professor.

No less a doctor than Martin Luther King also had suspicion cast on the validity of his academic title. At least Thomas Hardy could go to the grave happy in the knowledge that the doctoral gown in which he was buried concealed no other fiction than an honorary degree from Cambridge in acknowledgement of his fictional art.

I am not seeking to defend either the outright theft or the surreptitious purchase of another person's work. Nor am I unaware of the lazy habits internet research can develop in students who prefer the immediacy of copy and print to reading and assimilating their sources. But is it right to remove coursework because of the problems inherent in internet access?

I suspect that the greater issue with coursework is the extent to which it is teacher-led rather than pupil-inspired. Most assignments are invisible behind the scaffolding in place to support the weaker pupil. Add to that the disproportionate amount of time spent on coursework by pupils and teachers alike and the case for reform is clear. But is it fair to blame plagiarism for the radical changes now underway and is the only solution to replace coursework with yet another form of assessment?

We should address the need to educate pupils in how to use the internet responsibly, otherwise we are in danger of de-valuing the skills of selection, synthesis and re-working that, with due acknowledgment of sources, go to the heart of academic scholarship and inform the process of creating and recreating great works of art.

'…non-fiction source to whom I am indebted.'

"Only connect," urged E M Forster in *Howard's End*. Disconnecting the computer from the mains may not be a sufficiently imaginative response.

James Priory is Assistant Head, and Headmaster-elect, of The Portsmouth Grammar School. He also sits on the Steering Group for Conference & Common Room.

HERE & THERE

St Peter's Atlantic row

A sum of £6,000 was raised for the Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust and York Against Cancer by 300 children aged 8-13 from St Olave's School, York, the junior school of St Peter's. They 'rowed the Atlantic' on ergometers to raise the money.

The day started at 7am when 30 current and Old St Peter's rowers set the machines humming with 30 minutes each. From then on relays of their younger colleagues manned the machines for the next ten hours, putting in some fantastic distances way beyond the expectations of the organisers.

James Cracknell, Olympic and Atlantic rower, sent an encouraging letter to the children beforehand saying 'Remember, however far it is, always have belief that you will get there'. To keep interest and spirits up during the row James and Ben Fogle's DVD of their Atlantic row was played on a big screen. The whole row was planned and organised by geography teacher Peter Brooks.

The case for career appraisal

Nigel Richardson looks at some of the major developments in this field over the past 25 years, and suggests new directions

By common consent, one of the hardest career hurdles in independent schools is the jump from housemaster or head of department to deputy head or director of studies – unless of course one is fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time, and thus appointed from within.

By contrast, where posts are externally advertised, the fields tend to be very big, much larger than for many headships, and the competition is fierce. This is unsurprising, given that most HMC heads, especially in day schools, have now held a post of this type on their way to headship.

It was not always so – in the days when second masters were almost invariably senior common room figures appointed from within, when director of studies posts were unknown, and when few new heads even knew what a formal SMT was. One could wait months for an SMT-type post to apply for.

My first application (1979) went unanswered for several weeks. I emerged from a history lesson and took my courage in both hands, 'phoning the head's secretary. "Oh, we appointed ages ago," she said, "180 applicants: we only interviewed mathematicians and physicists." Shortage subjects and the head-start which applicants offering these subjects enjoy, haven't changed that much; schools, especially smaller and unendowed ones, are still tempted to get half a teaching timetable out of such people if they can.

I tried one or two more as they occasionally arose, but was eventually fortunate: a new head in the school in which I was already working decided to break with tradition in his second master, by going for a 35-year-old. I was offered the post without advertisement, application or interview.

A decade and a half later (1992), a sea-change had taken place. The *TES* regularly carried a double page or more of such jobs. Senior management teams were now widely recognised as the order of the day, and the role of the deputy was recognised as part of a career progression much more than a 'mind the shop when the head's away' role.

In that year, after a brief spell in prep school headship, I put myself into the senior school deputies' market once again. A dozen people made the long-list, and the school concerned organised a huge programme of interviews and visits to sort us out. There was a sizeable governor presence and, for four of us, the grilling was even more intense in round two a week later. I have met several of them as heads since.

So there is now a proper career structure for school leadership. There is more career development, too – thanks to the HMC conference for deputies, the growth of professional development courses run by IPD and others, and to the experience that many aspiring heads gained as inspectors during the first two cycles of ISI inspections. There are also more opportunities to exchange experience via cluster groups and divisions.

And yet ... could we still do more to prepare people for headship? It is often observed that no-one, however able, can appreciate the full range of demands on a modern head unless he or she has actually experienced it. There might be further ways of helping with this process.

First, at a time when independent schools are being constantly encouraged to contribute time and expertise to emerging academies, could there be benefits both ways in seconding a deputy part-time to such a project? Of course there are implications of both time and cost, but the independent sector has never faced up to the parlous lack of secondment opportunities for its high-flyers, compared with the maintained sector.

Secondly, should we be more proactive in encouraging other schools to appoint our deputies as their governors, rather than always turning to experienced heads? Insight and experience of how governing bodies work, of their collective chemistry and of how to channel governor expertise and enthusiasm, is one of the most difficult areas of training and too many new heads have to learn it the hard way.

Again, there could be two-way benefit: yes, there are potential recruitment spin-offs for senior schools in having a serving head on a prep school board, but we should not be afraid to admit that the right deputy might sometimes contribute more and in valuably different ways, as well as being able to attend its meetings more regularly.

Thirdly, and centrally for the purpose of this pair of articles, we owe it to our deputies to spend a little money on proper external appraisals for them every two years or so. Headship appraisal is now well-established, and most of us who have been in headship for a long period of time know the benefits of being assessed by an objective, experienced outsider – and of being able to assess oneself and one's future career aspirations frankly and privately.

With so many deputies now carrying out appraisals of teaching staff themselves, being on the receiving end of an encounter with an experienced but unfamiliar appraiser can only be beneficial. There are other reasons, too. If the head and the deputies are working really well together, the head risks losing the cutting edge of detachment about those closest to him or her which is an essential ingredient of any good appraisal exercise.

After all, he or she chose them in the first place, and if the subsequent relationship has been a successful one, the head's critical judgement may have been softened by a certain possessive pride in how things have turned out. It's often said that very longstanding heads tend to gather around them governors who are too similar to themselves in both temperament and abilities; there are even greater risks of this with an SMT.

Can we afford the costs of bringing in an outsider assessor? Of course we can – if we really value those who work most closely with us and if we hold to the view that the sector has a collective responsibility to give the best possible training to the school leaders of tomorrow.

Nigel Richardson has been Headmaster of The Perse School, Cambridge, since 1994. All the members of his senior management team have been through an external appraisal process. He is currently chairman of HMC.

Admirable or wobbly?

Chris Brown, an experienced external appraiser, describes what the process aims to achieve

'Every individual is like a company of infantry who leave their trenches and advance in certain places until they have occupied the enemy trench, while elsewhere they are held up or even forced to retreat. Every individual is similar to the line thus formed, with its spearheads and recessions: admirable here, wobbly there, and both at once. That is the touching thing about human beings.'

Henry de Montherlant

Compassion for others and a sense of one's own inadequacies seem to me vital in the process of appraising others. We are all 'admirable' and 'wobbly'. That's important to remember. I recall an acquaintance of mine who became a prominent reporting inspector regularly advocated practices which his own school had never seen.

For my part, I believe that heads and their senior staff now have more such professional support than I was afforded for much of my time as a head. So, appraising heads regularly, as I do, is an absorbing and humbling experience. Whilst you do accumulate some skills and knowledge over nearly 20 years in the role, inevitably you learn as well as contribute.

Of late I have been invited to look more often at individual senior members of staff, and also at groups. Coming from outside to review an SMT gives an almost surprising objectivity. It's notable how such teams grow like Topsy. In responding to the skills of certain members and the subsequent appointment of others, logic and clarity of responsibility and of role can quickly become obscured, particularly to the majority of staff.

The Headmaster was only able to give the issue of Simkins intermittent attention.

What are the strengths of the team, the nature of the inter-relationships? Is it a team? Does it manage? The answer to these questions is sometimes 'no'. So, holding a mirror up to nature has its values, particularly since when you are a head, the insistent demands of the job mean that you can only give the issue intermittent attention.

The request to appraise individual senior staff, I think, comes about in part because, whilst appraisal is well established in most schools, it has been repeatedly reviewed and re-invented. Time given to individuals every third year simply is not frequent enough, but what should be the weight of something more regular?

An annual demand on a head can become heavy: preparation, observation, interview and outcomes multiplied by x constitute a considerable burden. Furthermore, if the head is assessing the senior team annually, there may be too great a sense of repetition. Variations on a theme are helpful.

Obvious benefits exist in using an experienced person from beyond the school: for the head, time is saved and perhaps delicate issues explored dispassionately outside the daily relationship; for the individual, special care and evident expense are being focused in a context that is outside the framework of the school, helpful in its neutrality and form of anonymity.

The subject, in my experience, feels ready to unburden in a 'safe' setting. The appraiser is not the employer and issues explored do not affect that relationship. The cost can be less than many courses. What you hope to offer as appraiser is much as for a head: a depth of experience, a degree of perspective, giving a sense of the views of others in the community, and the offering of three or four key points in a positive and sensitive manner.

The person being appraised can helpfully design a questionnaire to be circulated round a number of other staff, focused on his or her needs and intentions. The responses are confidential to the appraiser, not attributable and not subsequently held by the school. The dialogue that ensues can be aided by some suggested areas from the head, but is

not influenced by the accumulation of views, assumptions and sensitivities that inevitably accrue in a school.

Indeed the head can be honest with me without fear of damaging the relationship with the member of staff. Helpfully naïve questions arise. The achievements of the individual, the perceptions of colleagues, together with the objectivity of the outsider, inform that dialogue. It can look at both the present and aims for the immediate future, but also at career aspirations.

If headship or deputy headship is to come next, what areas of relevant experience have not been met? What weaknesses exist in what has been covered? The suggestions that ensue are clearly intended solely for the benefit of the individual; there is no other context or history.

I also find that there is often follow up: further suggestions, revision of job description or development of new issues. In my experience, the head and the person appraised declare themselves pleased for all the obvious and stated reasons. I have not been aware of any adverse reaction amongst other staff provided the distribution of such a practice is seen as equitable.

Another task in the same area that I am being asked to undertake is a mock interview for a senior member of staff looking to move to a more senior post. The same advantages exist, but with an opportunity to review the CV and letter of application.

Again, those experiencing the process declare that it is helpful; time spent, focus and objectivity are factors in this reaction. As the interviewer you cannot second-guess the precise requirements of a particular school advertising a post (but then neither can those in the candidate's school), but you can focus very carefully on the experience and skills of the applicant and how they are presented.

It seems to be the way things are moving and so well worth more than a passing thought.

Chris Brown was Headmaster of Norwich School (1984-2002), Chairman of HMC (2001), and Deputy Chairman of ISC (2003-2006). Amidst a life of his own, he inspects, runs courses for IPD, and appraises heads and senior staff, individually and together.

HERE & THERE

Tops Off receiving the third place prize from Phil Hope MP at the U.K. Young Enterprise finals. From the left are Edward Boyes, Demi Akomolafe, Adam Greendale and Polly Aitken.

More Young Enterprise success for Hymers College

Following last year's success of Avian, who won the National Young Enterprise Award and finished second in Europe, another Hymers College company succeeded in finishing third in this year's national awards final. Hymers company Tops Off travelled to the Savoy Hotel to represent Yorkshire and Humber in the national finals of the competition. The team finished third from almost 4000 companies entering the competition, being only the second company from the Humber region to have ever finished in the top three. ICT director Ben Pindar was also awarded the prestigious Young Enterprise Humber Top Achiever award. Tops Off, comprising 13 Hymers Sixth Form students, produced and sold credit card bottle openers, which penetrated two diverse markets.

Roll out the barrel!

David Evans welcomes the Education Secretary's initiative to encourage singing

Recent words from the Education Secretary, Alan Johnson, were, if you will pardon the pun, music to the ears. He announced that in addition to the £25 million already ear-marked for instrumental tuition, there would be a further £10 million boost for music education, with singing particularly in mind.

He has appointed former chorister Howard Goodall as 'Singing Ambassador' and it was also announced that choir schools would "work in partnership with local schools and other music providers to boost local singing. Some choir schools are already providing a wide range of outreach activities including the provision of singing master classes and summer schools to their local community. There are 34 choir schools with three leading the way with outreach programmes. This initiative will be rolled out to around 20 more choir schools in 2007 with additional funding to expand their coverage of local schools." [From the DfES website]

David Evans, newly appointed Director of Music at Hereford Cathedral School, one of the schools already working on an outreach programme, takes up the story.

For many years the lack of singing and physical involvement in real music making has been a great concern. In a large number of schools, singing is out, seen merely as something elderly people used to do before television! It is actually the basis of one of the world's largest and most successful modern industries.

A tradition for singing is something that has to be worked at, and no modern school or community inherits this without care and effort. Singing should be as natural as talking, walking or running and is a gift which we all have at one level or another.

Having been a Director of Music at five schools, I have seen at first hand the benefits that a good sing brings to a community at the start of every day … it gets the brain working, the blood pumping, and is an activity in which all can share.

It is wonderful to see young students who come from schools where singing is 'not on the menu' experience the sound and feeling of community in their first Chapel Service when a school sings 'a good hymn', sadly something that fewer children experience in modern times.

I believe this was heralded by the onslaught of the classroom keyboard revolution of the 1980s. Keyboards have their place in music education but not at the expense of the voice. The decline in singing is mirrored in many parts of the country by a decline in the number of children learning orchestral instruments, in particular stringed instruments.

It is a great relief that the government has realised that our heritage of great choral singing is in danger of becoming elitist and is at last prepared to do something about it for the masses. Maybe they would also like to delve into the way in which children experience music and the levels of expectation in the classroom.

Not only should we educate our choral and instrumental

performers, we should also be educating the next generation of listeners. As it is for our wonderful cathedrals, support is needed if we are to restore our musical heritage and secure it for future generations.

Hereford Cathedral and the Cathedral School have a number of long established outreach projects in progress. The Cathedral Choir is at present very successful and its quality of performance has risen to critical acclaim in recent years. Outreach programmes are a crucial part of recruitment into a choir. Choirs like this don't just happen: they are the result of inspired leadership, dedicated partnership and positive recruitment. The parents of a chorister write:

'In September 2004 our son joined the Outreach Choir programme at Hereford Cathedral School. At that time there was not a choir in his primary school and we felt this was an ideal opportunity for him to sing with children from other schools. The fact that the choir was run by a professional musician was very attractive.

'Rory thoroughly enjoyed the singing experience; the professionalism and encouragement of the staff, the opportunity to perform the choir's wide repertoire, gave him confidence and most importantly pleasure. That December he successfully auditioned as a chorister for the Cathedral Choir. The Outreach programme gave him a wonderful opportunity of singing in a choir, making new friends, introduced him to a variety of music and, of course, gave him the chance to become a chorister.'

And this from an 18-year-old HCS student and former chorister:

'I was nine years of age when I heard the Cathedral Choir for the first time as a young member of Ludlow Parish Church choir, and resolved of my own accord to involve myself with that standard of glorious music-making that is I believe seldom afforded to children of such an age.

'Despite misgivings about the implications of having to board at the school, I persuaded my parents to arrange a voice trial with the director of music at the time, Dr Roy Massey, who stipulated that all prospective choristers demonstrate not only good vocal potential, but also a good degree of musicianship on at least one other instrument.

'As a promising young pianist, this requirement presented me with a new challenge in itself, and given what I perceived was a fearfully high requisite standard, my ambitions as a pianist escalated overnight as I prepared a Chopin Nocturne for what was eventually a successful audition.

'The four-and-a-half years that I spent in the Hereford Cathedral Choir were perhaps the most formative years of my entire education, from both a musical and non-musical perspective. At the younger end of the choir, one rapidly realises the importance of integration and cooperation with one's peers, without which social alienation becomes a miserable way of life.

'Throughout my entire tenure, a "professional" standard of musicianship became a daily expectation, and the gift of "absolute" or "perfect pitch" was acquired as a result of the rigorous musical requirements of a chorister, and this rare facility remains with me today.'

A background such as this gives a child so much. At Hereford Cathedral Junior School there are over 50 string players, numerous ensembles, and superb choirs who have their own outreach projects. Before the end of the spring, the

non-cathedral chorister choirs will have led choral evensong services at St George's Chapel, Windsor, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, York Minster and Hereford Cathedral, in addition to singing on BBC radio.

In the Senior School there is an enormous variety of bands, choirs, orchestras and chamber music in which students can be involved which naturally flows from the groundwork of the formative years. Both the Junior and Senior Schools have very significant outreach projects which involve school children, the local community and international relations.

The Grieg Piano Concerto, Haydn Trumpet Concerto and Wagner Mastersingers Overture are programmed for later this term, with ex-choristers as concerto soloists accompanied by the school symphony orchestra, and next term a composition of former Deep Purple musician Jon Lord will involve numerous junior school pupils from the locality with HCS orchestras and choirs in a performance in Hereford Cathedral. As part of the school's extended outreach, plans are afoot for a large-scale choral collaboration next year with a major national orchestra.

Children know what is good, they are most discerning about their preference and acceptance, they respect quality and need exposure to all kinds of music. I am delighted that at last there has been an initiative to do something about the state of choral music. Let's hope this is a catalyst for music and can be mirrored by a similar aid programme that exposes children to orchestral music.

David Evans is the Director of Music at Hereford Cathedral School and founder and Director of the National Schools' Symphony Orchestra.

Call of the wild

Trevor Clarke, teacher and explorer, describes the benefits of a BSES expedition

We started life as the Public Schools Exploring Society (PSES), 75 years ago. Today, still very much alive, the British Schools Exploring Society (BSES) is celebrating an important anniversary.

We are the oldest exploring society for young people in the world, still adhering to the principles of our founder, Murray Levick, the surgeon commander on Robert Scott's expedition to Antarctica, who established the society in 1932 with the intention of providing young people with an intense and lasting experience of self-discovery in a demanding and natural wilderness environment.

That, coupled with physical adventure, scientific fieldwork and, of course, fun, is still the framework for current BSES expeditions. Whilst the name has changed to encompass pupils from all British schools, independent schools still provide the majority of our young explorers.

At least three expeditions go out every summer, from mid July to late August, to three remote environments: arctic, jungle and mountainous.

Pupils need to be between 16 and 20 years old at the start of the expedition and to have gained sufficient appropriate experience to convince the chief leader that they will not only cope with, but also gain from, what is a remarkable, often life-changing summer. Pupils who are active in the CCF, sea cadets *etc*, or in the latter stages of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, progress naturally onto a BSES expedition.

Duke of Edinburgh participants can complete both the residential and expedition components of their gold award on expedition. Their familiarity with overcoming adversity,

taking responsibility and working as a team, often under testing conditions, will be well established, but a month or more spent well beyond the comfort zone will stretch and excite them.

Inevitably an expedition will itself lead many onto greater achievements, perhaps in exploration, but perhaps in striving for goals that previously they considered unobtainable. BSES excels here also, with a leadership training scheme, leading to an NVQ level 3, for those in their 20s, as well as assistant leadership positions on a second BSES expedition.

I have encouraged and taken pupils from my own school on BSES expeditions and, in the summer of 2005, I was the chief leader of the expedition to Svalbard, a group of islands 600 miles south of the North Pole. Together with 15 adult colleagues, I took 61 teenagers, divided, as in all expeditions, into groups of 12, each with two leaders.

Youngsters from across the nation who, until the briefing weekend the Easter before had never met each other, became a cohesive self-reliant group and they will, I know, continue to meet and explore together, maybe for years to come. Those strong bonds of friendship were formed during moments of panic calmed, moments of sublime astonishment, moments of sitting cramped in a tent while a storm raged. I also know that such an experience will change them as individuals.

This becomes apparent whenever I encounter their parents and ask them what happened to their son or daughter. I regularly hear the same reply, that they are struck by a self-confidence, expressed without arrogance, which their child seems to have gained, an appreciation of the important values of life, and a desire to do it again.

The society is also exceptional in providing youngsters with a knowledge of the places that they encounter, as a science programme supplies an immediate insight into their environment. On my expedition, I took a biologist, geologist, paleobiologist, physiologist and a glaciologist. Many of my young explorers chose field work connected to their A level subjects, or in their prospective university degree course.

BSES has always conducted relevant science programmes, and we continue to reap the benefits of so doing, particularly as we often revisit the same areas after a few years and can build on previous studies. We can draw on the experience of our scientists and are able to supply years of information on such things as glacial retreat, bird migration, forest regeneration *etc*. This valuable bank of information is currently being made available to all schools and pupils as a teaching resource, and not just to those on expedition.

I also tried, unsuccessfully I may add, to recruit independent school teachers onto my expedition. I am aware that there are many educational benefits to be had from first hand experiences and it is also important to appoint leaders who are comfortable working with teenagers. Scientists and mountaineers are the obvious categories, but equally important are for example, base camp managers and linguists for in-country assistance.

For myself, the opportunity to walk where there are no paths and watch wildlife that 'knows' little of the human race, draws me back time again. To 'bask' in the midnight sun, absorbed in views that few people have seen, goads me into wanting the same for others. To be totally at the whim of the extreme weather conditions, but to have the time and flexibility to accommodate other objectives, encapsulates a genuine expedition experience, and camping next to a calving glacier becomes commonplace, as does carrying a rifle in case of polar bear attack.

Roping together before setting foot on a deeply crevassed glacier, carrying heavily loaded sacks, was as familiar as pitching a tent using ice screws. I could go on. I only wish that I had known about the society whilst I was a schoolboy.

Dr Trevor A Clarke FRGS is head of biology and until recently a boarding housemaster at St Lawrence College, Ramsgate, Kent. He is also a member of the BSES council, and information about BSES can be found by visiting www.bses.org.uk

Books for review should be sent to the Editor, Tom Wheare, 63 Chapel Lane, Zeals, Warminster, Wilts BA12 6NP

Auden and Gresham's – The Auden Centenary; Wystan Hugh Auden 1907- 1973

Why was Wystan Auden sent to Gresham's just after the 1914-18 War? A small school far away in East Anglia was on the face of it an odd choice for the son of a Birmingham doctor in charge of children's health in the Midland Region and an Anglo-Catholic mother.

A remarkable Headmaster, George Howson, was appointed to Gresham's from Uppingham in 1900 at the age of 40. Like Thring, he believed in the centrality of science and design in the curriculum. He forbade corporal punishment, instituting a trust system of self-discipline instead, and he didn't believe in competitive sport. The only school fixture was an annual hockey match against Gordonstoun.

Under him, Gresham's was transformed from a small day school into an outstanding boarding school to which parents with original ideas and of adventurous temperament were attracted from all over the country – there were railways in North Norfolk then.

Staff and pupils of the same cast of mind followed, producing an amazing crop of mould-breaking designers to whom we owe the hovercraft, radar, flying boats, swing-wings, vertical takeoff and even the Dyson vacuum cleaner.

The school also nurtured artists, musicians and writers such as Ben Nicholson, Benjamin Britten, Lennox Berkeley, Stephen Spender and Wystan Auden himself. It is a remarkable roll call, though they were not all there at once.

They were taught by a common room dedicated to Howson's ideas, of whom one of the best remembered was Frank McEachran, the inspiration for the eccentric but brilliant Hector in Alan Bennett's recent play *The History Boys*. He went on to Shrewsbury, sacked from Gresham's by J R Eccles, Auden's Headmaster, because he occasionally beat boys and the mother of one complained.

The circle that gathered round Auden at Oxford and afterwards is instructive: Stephen Spender, who had left Gresham's from the junior forms in 1918, Louis MacNeice, from Marlborough, who was his exact contemporary, Cecil Day Lewis, and Christopher Isherwood who had been at prep school with Auden.

They were a dynamically creative group that included political dissidents, quasi-communists, pacifists, homosexuals (including WHA himself), at a time when it was more dangerous to be those things than now. Rex Warner and John Betjeman (also from Marlborough) were friends too.

Auden, Spender, MacNeice and Day Lewis became known as the Pylon School, after a poem of Stephen Spender's of 1933, poets who took too many of their images from the new industrial age in the opinion of some.

Benjamin Britten, who had been in Auden's house at Gresham's after his time, met Auden at The Downs School in Malvern, where WHA went to teach in 1932. They were both working for the GPO Film Unit and became close friends.

They frequently collaborated over the next ten to 15 years, with Auden much the dominant partner. At the party thrown for Benjamin Britten when he left London with Peter Pears for America just before the war, the high point was Britten's setting of Auden's words 'Tell me the truth about love', now a much-anthologised poem.

The decision of Auden and Britten to go to America, as war approached, was made after much heartfelt discussion. The reasons were notably, for Britten his pacifism and desire for self-fulfilment, and for Auden 'to escape the suffocating insular coziness' of the English intellectual establishment and to provide the income to keep writing.

They kept in close touch there. Benjamin Britten said that when he decided to return home in 1941, he was in part pushed into it by reading a *Listener* article by E M Forster on George Crabbe, born in Britten's beloved Aldeburgh, very likely sent to him by Auden who was a friend of Forster.

Auden challenged him on departure, "If you are really to develop to your full stature you will have, I think, to suffer and make others suffer in ways that are totally strange to you at present." Britten's response to this led to some of his finest works, especially his operas.

Indeed Britten later believed Auden had influenced all his great operas written after the war in some way. Auden had already written the libretto of Britten's early opera, *Paul Bunyan*, produced in May 1941 but it was not a successful collaboration. Britten had found Auden rather overbearing and, somewhat sadly, when Auden went to Britten's *Gloriana* at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1953, they did not meet.

Auden wrote afterwards, 'Everyone was charming but I was never allowed to see Ben alone – I feared as much, still I was a bit sad.' A friendship had cooled. This was, though, unusual, as Auden was the most loyal person to those many he had met, worked with or taught.

In *Selected Poems*, published in 1938 just after he left the staff of The Downs School, one poem reveals much of his thinking and shows how far he had travelled by the age of 31. He had reacted very strongly against what he saw as the loss of mutual trust under imposed systems such as the Trust System in the Gresham's of his day, objecting to the possibility of informers that he saw as the inevitable result of it – particularly frightening if you were in a small community discovering yourself.

He wrote of this famously in Graham Greene's anthology of school reminiscences *The Old School* (Jonathan Cape 1934). At The Downs, which suited the young and eccentric Auden perfectly, he had discovered the joy of being in a close-knit common room who were friends. The poem *Out on the lawn I lie in bed* is dedicated to the Headmaster of the school, Geoffrey Hoyland, a pivotal figure in his life, as Howson and Eccles at Gresham's had been, but personally much closer. How many headmasters have had poetical masterpieces dedicated to them?

W H Auden as Caliban in 1925 in a production in the open-air theatre at Gresham's.

We know from Auden's letters, from friends, from his poems and from the numerous books about him that continue to be written, that his influence on his generation was great. Many of those who were taught by Auden could recall what he had said and done in detail.

Recollections of his teaching at The Downs School were collected and reviewed in 2001 in an Oxford DPhil thesis on Auden's teaching and theories of education by Daniel Varholy of Hebbronville, Texas, with the title of Auden's own words – *Tumbling is all I have learned to do*. His lessons ranged from classroom games, to essays with very quirky titles, to after lunch tests for the whole school when they had to list all the pronouns used in English from memory and go back a few days later if they left any out.

A boy there then, John Bowes, later Second Master at Cheltenham College, kept in touch for the rest of Auden's life. He has an autograph book from his school days, dated 1932, containing a limerick inscribed and signed by Auden.

'There once was a juggler called Bowes,
Who gave most remarkable shows.
He would balance a bear
On the tip of each ear
And a horse on the tip of his nose.'

Fun and games were never far away. Frank McEachran used to do such things too. In 1974 he published a collection of 442 'Spells' – poems and quotations to be recited by his pupils in class, 44 of them from Auden.

Before and after his time at The Downs Auden had collaborated and travelled, notably to Iceland in 1936 with Louis MacNeice, a journey which coincided with a Bryanston School trip and led to *Letter From Iceland* (1937). Boys that were on it recall vividly the fun and games, innocent and delightful. It suited the young and eccentric Auden perfectly. His combination of humour and seriousness was beautifully expressed in the refrain of his *Christmas Carol* set to music by Britten, which made those who heard it at the Memorial Services in New York and Oxford both laugh and cry.

'O lift your little pinkie
And touch the winter sky
Love's all over the mountains
Where the beautiful go to die.'

The present Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in New York holds Auden to be a crucial influence on him from his college days and, in 2005, accorded Auden the highest honour they can give, a plaque in the American Poets Corner in the Cathedral. At the unveiling ceremony, which my wife and I were fortunate to attend, the Dean spoke of Auden's deep Christian faith and his influence on generations of young Americans such as him.

To span two countries and two cultures like this is a rare achievement. Auden's mother died early in his time in the States and from then he reappraised the Anglo-Catholic faith his parents had shown him, revealing this in his long poem of 1941, *New Year Letter*. He also revisited a number of his anti-Christian early poems and began to write in a way that makes him a very considerable Christian poet.

Soon after arriving in America Auden met Chester Kallman, then aged 18. Theirs was a long friendship and collaboration on a number of projects, notably the libretto for Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. After the war they always spent the summers together in Europe, especially in Kirchstetten in Austria, where they owned a house in the village.

It must have meant a great deal to Auden when he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He became a Student of Christ Church, his old college, and conscientiously fulfilled the demands of this post from 1956-1960, spending a few months of each year in Oxford, commenting in the introduction to his collection of lectures and other critical writings, *The Dyer's Hand & Other Essays* (Faber and Faber 1963), 'It is a sad fact about our culture that a poet can earn much more money writing or talking about his art than he can by practising it'.

In fact his reputation as a poet continues to grow and each new generation responds to his poems. Those who saw the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* will not forget *Funeral Blues*.

Gresham's School is to commemorate his centenary in 2007, with events on and around his birthday, February 21st, and a three-day celebration, 'In Praise of Auden' on September 14th, 15th and 16th, with service, lectures, concerts, film shows and a dinner, to which all connected with the school and well-wishers are invited.

Personal memories of him and any unpublished material would be welcomed. This is all being co-ordinated by John Smart, ex-Head of English at Gresham's, c/o Gresham's School, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 6EA.

On the frontispiece of *The Dyer's Hand,* which he dedicated to his old Oxford tutor, he wrote:

' For Neville Coghill
Three grateful memories:
a home full of books, a childhood spent in country provinces,
a tutor in whom one could confide.'

Just so.

Hugh Wright is a for mer Headmaster of Gresham's.

The critic on the hearth

David Gibbs explores the link between Shrewsbury School and Neville Cardus

Developing the talents of pupils from less privileged backgrounds is a current theme for members of HMC. It should not be forgotten however that this principle of diversity can also be extended to members of staff.

The opening of the Cardus Cricket Centre at Shrewsbury School is a pertinent reminder of the way in which a far-seeing and imaginative Head spotted a singularly talented individual, and then fostered his development into one of the great journalists of the 20th Century.

That the young man concerned was the son of a prostitute, ended his formal education on leaving elementary school at age 13, and was employed by Shrewsbury as Assistant Cricket Professional, makes the story even more remarkable.

Neville Cardus was born in Manchester in 1889, and brought up by his mother and aunt in Rusholme, a lively and cosmopolitan inner city area of artisans, teachers, clerks and immigrants from different parts of Europe.

There was no evidence of a father, but the home was secure and late Victorian/early Edwardian Manchester was an exciting city in which to develop budding interests in music and cricket. Cardus educated himself, reading a lot, developing his singing, going to concerts and turning himself into a good local league cricketer.

For the summer of 1912 he was engaged as the Assistant Cricket Professional at Shrewsbury, giving up his dreary job as an insurance clerk. The Headmaster, Dr Cyril Alington, soon recognised that here was a young man who was much more than simply a cricket professional.

He talked with him, lent him books from his library and encouraged him. In 1914 when Alington's (male) secretary left for the trenches, he found a room for Cardus next to his study, who in the mornings wrote his letters and acted as a sort of modern day PA.

Cardus loved his years at Shrewsbury. His experience was broadened beyond the slightly narrow artistic/musical life of Manchester. He got to know both pupils and members of staff, and relished the life of the School community.

When Alington moved to Eton at the end of the 1916 summer he tried to persuade Cardus to come with him as his full-time secretary. By now however Cardus had wider aspirations, as well as confidence. He returned home and found a job with the *Manchester Guardian* then at the height of its powers under the great editorship of C P Scott. He progressed rapidly, becoming its chief cricket correspondent in 1919, and then its music critic in 1927. It was an idyllic life, often spending the day at Old Trafford, followed by the evening listening to the Hallé perform at the Free Trade Hall.

From the 1920s to the 1960s he was one of the nation's best known and most widely read writers on cricket and music, an author capable of doing justice to the exploits of Barbirolli and Bradman, Beacham and Bedser. He travelled a lot, not least in reporting on MCC tours (as England) abroad.

He was a stirring writer with the great ability to evoke the scene, be it the cricket ground or the concert hall. He knew everyone who mattered in these worlds. More than 20 books flowed from his pen, always pertinent, often with trenchant opinions.

His later years were sad and embittered, and he died a lonely man in 1975. He is not however forgotten, for he was a great writer and journalist who had come from the most humble of origins, thanks in part to the support and encouragement of a visionary Headmaster. The Cardus Centre reminds us that developing talent from a wide diversity of backgrounds has been going on in our schools for a very long time.

Cricket at Shrewsbury, where Cardus was assistant cricket professional. He loved his time there.

Seeing, Remembering, Imagining

Nature's Engraver: A Life of Thomas Bewick
by Jenny Uglow; Faber

Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man
by Claire Tomalin; Viking Adult

Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Twentieth-Century Britain
by Julia Stapleton; Lexington Books

"A new life of Thomas Bewick? Then you'll want to see these," and so saying my friend brought out two little pencil drawings, one touched with ink. Their immediacy was breath-taking; it was as if 'Nature's Engraver' himself had come into the room, and flung open minute windows onto exquisite landscapes.

Amused by my raptures, my friend next remembered another of his family heirlooms which, he rather vaguely thought, had "something special" about it. This, or rather these, turned out to be first editions of Bewick's great books of *British Birds*, of 1797 and 1804 respectively, the pages still ragged from the eager paper-knife that first revealed their splendours.

The 'something special' was an autograph letter in Bewick's rapid, masterly hand, tucked into *Land Birds*; and – the cherry on the icing – both volumes were enriched by a contemporary transcription of annotations made by John Ruskin, the originals of which are now safely secreted in Sheffield.

The publication of *British Birds* marked an epoch in the development of ornithology, and, no less, in the history of engraving and printing; nothing like them had been seen before, whether for the precision with which the birds were observed, or the brilliance with which they were portrayed. I bore the precious volumes to my study, and spent an afternoon, magnifying glass in hand, examining their every detail.

A master with pencil and pen, Bewick was nothing less than a genius with graver and boxwood block. His slightest, lightest touch could catch the nervousness of a horse, the excitement of a dog, the fury of a fighting cock. He conveys the chill of the Northumbrian rain, the biting blast of the wind, the sullen pounding of the sea. He could use black lines to suggest the hues of a feather.

Ruskin's interpolations were fascinating too, in their way. By turns admiring ('Quite glorious in all intellectual and executive qualities – scene thought and done to the uttermost so far as the subject had anything in it ... and as his means went'); condescending (of a shore scene: 'Poor – He had never seen fine cliffs I suppose'); penetrating ('When he feels he has done his feathers well he always goes in hard for the background too'); arrogant ('Good – but I can do better myself'); and plain silly ('This perpetual fishing with no joy in the beauty of the stream or shore – a most woful [*sic*] and wonderful condition of degradation in Bewick's mind'); his comments reflect the unease of a nineteenth-century gentleman-aesthete faced with Bewick's artisan, radical naturalism.

Comically, he offers no comments at all on the earthier engravings – the farmer pissing against a wall, or squatting unbreeched to relieve himself over a rail.

Bewick's latest biographer, Jenny Uglow, however, sees his uncompromising adherence to the realities of his upbringing as the principal source of his strength. By comparison with her great life of William Hogarth, this is a simpler study, less extensive and less crowded – a fair reflection of the difference between her subjects. But her evocation of life in the landscape of Northumbria at the turn of the eighteenth century is as sharply defined as one of Bewick's own miniatures.

This farmer-craftsman-artist lived in a time (1753-1828) and place (Tyneside) characterised equally by stability and upheaval. His England was still an agricultural society, patterned, hierarchical, governed by tradition; yet the Bewick family were mining coal, investing in canals and travelling on steam packets to London, and Thomas engraved billheads for factory owners and currency notes for bankers.

It was an era of revolutions abroad and riots at home, an era of intellectual realignments and changing sensibilities, and one which many Englishmen, including Bewick, found unsettling. He was a North Countryman through and through, a Northumbrian in habits and accent, even recognisably a Norseman by descent; essentially libertarian and radical in his thinking, he was staunchly traditionalist in his personal style and behaviour, and he mourned the passing of old certainties with the same uneasy sensitivity that caused him to oppose cruelty to animals while ardently pursuing them with rod and gun.

His wood-engraving was an expression of the same contradictions: he took up an ancient but crude and little-regarded craft, transformed it with his skills and creative genius into a major art form, and made from it a substantial commercial fortune. (The letter in my friend's copy of *Land Birds*, dated 'Newcastle 15 December 1810', is all about rents due to Bewick, and paid; here is a businessman managing his money with acumen and care.)

A man of patriarchal instincts who was deeply careful of his family, and almost equally attached to his brood of apprentices (several of whom he trained up to be successful artists in their own right), Bewick was nonetheless a solitary – a great walker, in all weathers (50 miles in a day over the Northumbrian hills seems to have been little for him, to an advanced age), a silent observer and compulsive recorder (he drew all the time, on bits of wood, or stone, or any surface at hand), given to brooding over ruins and communing with the dead in churchyards.

It may be significant that one of his sons showed tendencies that might today be called autistic. Thomas had much in common with his near-contemporary, the poet John Clare; but he was spared the extremes of Clare's afflictions.

Bewick, like Clare, is close to the centre of the English love-affair with nature and the countryside. Another of the high priests of that mystery, Thomas Hardy, is celebrated by Claire Tomalin in her latest biography. This is a heavier book than Uglow's enchantingly elegant production – longer, more thickly detailed, bedecked with critical apparatus – and, in the end, less seductive, though this may be as much the fault of the subject as of the author.

Hardy, like Bewick, came of rural stock and was shaped by life on the land; the fiddle-tunes of Dorset rang in his ears from childhood to old age, as insistently as did the lilting strains of the Northumbrian pipes for Bewick; both men celebrated the rusticity of their native regions, both achieved fortune and eminence, both were radical in their sympathies and cautious in their conduct.

But Hardy lived in a time, and perhaps a place, less propitious than Bewick's, and his relationship with his roots was uneasy at best, embittered at worst. Tomalin tells a terrible story of Hardy's mother waving from her wheelchair at a procession of grand guests who were visiting her son to pay tribute to him – Hardy's wife, Emma, would not allow her in the house.

Perhaps the fault was in the stars. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that by the time of Hardy's birth in 1840, 'Old England', the England of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Wordsworth, was fast dying, and it was Hardy's fate to be an eloquent recorder of the twilight feelings that overshadowed so many minds in the later nineteenth century.

The doomed characters in his novels, the autumnal nostalgia of his poetry, his own reluctant retreat into agnostic deism, are all expressions of the dark under-current of doubt which ran beneath the pomps of Victorian prosperity and imperialism.

In his personal life, Hardy himself can be seen as something of a victim – a casualty of the class and sex wars which raged around and above him from before his birth until after his death; Tomalin's accounts of his mother's forced marriage, and of the black farce of his two burials, make compelling and tragic reading.

Relations between the classes and the sexes were harder, colder and more exploitative in late nineteenth-century England than they had been in Bewick's day; Hardy, a born survivor and opportunist (at his birth, the midwife put him aside as dead for a while), chose to make his way through them by a series of compromises and equivocations which would have been alien to the Northumbrian.

He was wealthy in his old age, and very adequately adorned with honours; but he built himself a house that he knew was ugly, and never seems to have been able to enjoy himself without reservations or regrets. His emotional life was a perpetual, hungry search for a soul-mate, but although women fought over him, none of them ever fulfilled his dreams.

Thomas Hardy was hailed in his own lifetime as a singer of the English rural idyll, but there is a dying strain in his song – he hymns the memory, rather than the presence. The folk-songs of his childhood were already becoming collectors' curiosities, and the church band in which his father and uncles played was dismissed in favour of a harmonium before young Thomas could join it; all his tunes are sad echoes of yester-year.

But the theme was not worked out to the end by the time of Hardy's death in 1924, and the middle years of the twentieth century heard variations from a number of players, including Sir Arthur Bryant, the subject of a new study by Julia Stapleton.

This is a drily academic piece of work, quite lacking in the airs and graces which adorn the works of Uglow and Tomalin; each chapter opens with a set of questions which the reader must answer, and there is no speculative toying with the subject's personal feelings. But Stapleton's scholarly analysis of Bryant's lifelong devotion to the writing of popular 'national' history is thought-provoking and even, at times, disturbing.

Like Bewick and Hardy, and the vast majority of English people over the last 300 years, Bryant was a self-conscious social outsider; but whereas Bewick shouldered his way roughly through the crowd, and Hardy ably played the sly opportunist, Bryant made himself a master of the obsequious arts and aimed deliberately at the exercise of influence.

All three men were inspired to passion by the English countryside and the rural way of life, but Bryant was driven by a sense of the evanescence of the things he loved, and was tortured by nostalgia for a past which grew rosier in his vision as it receded from view.

If Bewick loved what he saw and Hardy what he remembered, Bryant loved what he imagined of the past, and consciously tried to weave its threads into a national legend which should contribute to the strengthening of a national identity.

As a practitioner, Bryant the historian does not rank with Bewick the engraver or Hardy the novelist and poet. But his skills were not negligible and his significance is worth pondering. Along with G M Trevelyan, Herbert Butterfield and A L Rowse – all of whom applauded his work as friends – he wrote the last chapters in the Whig tradition of English historiography, and the eclipse of his reputation is part of the eclipse of an entire culture.

Michael St John Parker.

HERE & THERE

Classic rhythm raises roof on Seaford's new music school

A group of wandering minstrels were among VIPs invited to officially open a new £1m music school at Seaford College, near Petworth, West Sussex.

The widely-travelled musicians Classic Rhythm, comprising flautist Helen O'Connell, percussionist Chris Brannick and Adrian Sutcliffe on keyboards, performed a varied and versatile programme to some 50 specially-invited guests who included Richard Sayer, Chairman of the Hove-based Hollington Trust, which helped to fund the project, his wife Georgina, Seaford's Deputy Chairman of Governors Penny Hadley, and heads of local preparatory schools.

The music school, constructed in an historic stable block at the Lavington Park College, includes a state-of-the-art recording studio, individual teaching and practice rooms, a computer room, keyboard room, spacious performance venues – even a sound-proofed band practice room!

A phoenix in NW7

Strikingly Alive, by Roddy Braithwaite

Mill Hill School, in corporate partnership with its junior school, Belmont, and its pre-prep, Grimsdell, evidently has much to celebrate as it approaches its bicentenary.

This admirable history, the School's first for all but a century, must figure importantly among its recent achievements and underline the sense of renewal. Those who commissioned it are to be commended for putting the task in the hands of a former pupil uniquely qualified to produce a robustly dispassionate account, of interest to many far beyond the centripetal circles of the Old Millhillians Club: the author is a professional analyst on two relevant fronts, being a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the Chartered Management Institute.

He has taken the title from an entry in Prime Minister Gladstone's diary for June 1879, rating the School, which he had just visited on its New Foundation Day, as an 'Institution strikingly alive'. This judgment is all the more telling for being a private one, not included in his (relatively short!) Address, and because the School, founded three years before the GOM's birth, failed and was resuscitated less than a dozen years earlier.

The title is especially cogent today: a similar dozen years ago the School was again – and not merely for the second time – facing a problematical future. The changes in direction (emphasising both senses of that word) which have produced a veritable phoenix in NW7, occurred shortly before Roddy Braithwaite's research began.

The quality of this research informs the whole book; and the sensible way in which its results are presented makes his survey accessible as well as authoritative. The text generally flows pretty well: each chapter's comprehensive sources are clustered at its end, while further reference-data are tabled in two dozen pages of appendices and indices.

The simple dipping-in likely to engage most Old Millhillians, as well as the noting of documentary evidence by critical readers, is therefore more easily done than the weight of information – and of the volume – over three and a half pounds! –- might suggest. The proof reading too has been commendably alert.

The scope of such scholarly research deserves to stimulate non-alumni interest, not least amongst those minded, or challenged, to compile a comparable record for another school. For example, the exposition of the Free Church movement within which the Protestant Dissenters Grammar School was founded two centuries ago as a 'school of the Enlightenment', followed by its gradual subsumation into the Establishment – social advance involving a shift of alliance from the Chapel to the Church – has a value beyond its explanation of why, between the years of Jena and of Konniggratz, the School lost its target market and arguably also its founding principles.

The 'Congregational network' laid claim to an 'inclusivity' which encompassed acceptance into the governing class and the universities; its dedication to intellectual freedom and liberty of conscience was substantiated by the foundation of academic institutions with a fresh view of education.

Of these, Mill Hill School was long the pivotal exemplar. Such 'inclusivity' inevitably widened as the historic areas of Dissenting residence ceased to steer their scions to the School – most obviously with the cultural diversification of North London and the passing of the boarding-school ethos except in a handful of schools with incomparably greater alumni-rolls, endowments and prestige. Mill Hill's 'inclusivity' has, at its bicentenary, turned full circle, with the appointment of a Roman Catholic as the next Headmaster and its Commemoration Service being held in St Paul's Cathedral.

More original areas of research have been in the archives of the HMC and the Maudsley Hospital. The first reveal how much earlier than previously supposed Mill Hill's Head was invited ('as settled') to participate in the meetings inaugurated at Uppingham in the year of its New Foundation.

Not only did he attend from 1872, but Dr Weymouth made educationally stirring impacts through the 1870s, for instance inveighing against corporal punishment and arguing in favour of more and better teaching of mathematics and modern foreign languages.

Similarly, there is much fresh material about the role of Mill Hill Emergency Hospital during the Second World War, when surgical provision staffed by Barts combined with and was then replaced by innovative psychiatric therapies developed by experts from the Maudsley, including Hans Eysenck. Such activities are of clearly wider interest than the limbo-existence of the School's truncated roll of boys and beaks evacuated to the Cumbrian coast.

Their return in 1945, under the redoubtable Dr Whale, was not facilitated by the physical damage at the hands of the British as well as the German military, nor by the financial implications of the wartime uses to which the premises were put. There was some delayed compensation from the Ministry, but no revenue from a commercial lease. The School's viability was now once again precarious.

White knights appeared in the form of the Middlesex County Council Scheme which survived for two decades and was then partly continued, for a further dozen years, by the Borough Boarding Scheme. 'The Scheme' was under discussion from 1942, thus anticipating the Butler Education Act and the Fleming Report – and, of course, the Assisted Places programme. This history sets it out publicly for the first time and it is of considerably more than partisan or local interest.

Its application at Mill Hill was exceptional: it catered exclusively for a boys' boarding entry at 13+ and initially budgeted for half the boarders on the roll. Illuminatingly, the tuition fee was calculated at £50 as against a boarding fee of £110. These boys' pre-entry standard ensured that they generally skipped the 'sophomore' year and contributed disproportionately to a period of distinguished academic results, particularly in the 1950s.

The longer-term consequence was, predictably, a deferred crisis in boarding intake. When this form of transfusion was terminated in 1977, few plans were in place or contacts established for sustaining the School's phlebotic balance. This failure of leadership and gubernatorial vision was exacerbated by the presence of some pre-war practices at pupil level ('inflexible hierarchies and arbitrary injustices'). The prospect for the 1980s was really quite challenging. In addition, for 20 years from 1975, there was effectively no strategic or managerial partnership between the Chairman of the Governors ('The Court') and the Headmaster. Are there still any schools in the independent sector, or indeed the maintained, which have yet to learn that educational establishments are only as good as their governing bodies?

This history's final chapters offer heartening testimony to what a Dame and a violinist can achieve together in the right circumstances. The sharp national drop in boarding applications around 1995 positioned the School to take advantage of post-Thatcherite wealth-creation, a stable economy and a decline (at least in parental perceptions) of the adequacy of educational provision by the state.

Among the range of virtues in this history is the fact that the author remains aware of the contexts and contingencies of his subject, both external and internal: another, his reliance on analysis rather than anecdote. Again, he gains credit and credibility in his general understanding of curricula and inter-school competition for fee-payers.

Unsurprisingly, however, it is in these areas where it is worth correcting a couple of errors, one of interpretation and the other of omission. First, he reports that with the advent of GCSEs, 'pressure on the curriculum' led to the demise of the schools Section Bilingue – the best-known feature of the School's academic profile since Michael Hart's era.

The truth is that the awarding bodies refused to accept Geography/History-in-French as one thing or the other, let alone both: one half of the hybrid supposedly erected a barrier to the validation of the other – and, anyway, the new exam-regime laid a welcome stress on teaching in the target language.

Secondly, the School's traditional loyalty to Common Entrance as a qualifying examination (quite apart from the 13+ age of normal entry which Belmont's structure required) put it progressively at a disadvantage against schools that were increasing their 11+ entry and offering firm places in advance of CE.

The School's Head decided to use the awareness and the status gained while chairing the HMC's London Division and change Mill Hill's CE hurdle into a setting examination, with guaranteed places offered earlier to well-attested candidates. This was an executive decision, as was the same Head's questionnaire to boarding pupils' parents about Sunday Chapel, paving the way to its phasing out. It became very evident that both changes were what the market wanted.

Sir John McClure (of whom the DNB exaggeratedly says 'he transformed an unknown Nonconformist school to public school status') declared during the First World War: "we should be thinking backwards but living forwards." The School is now clearly and vigorously doing the latter. It is indebted to the author of this history for doing and recording the former so magisterially.

Alastair Graham was Headmaster of Mill Hill from 1979 to 1992.

The VCs of the Playroom

Stonyhurst: T E Muir; St Omer's Press, 2006

The most striking aspect of T E Muir's erudite account of the evolution of the principal English school, established by the Society of Jesus, is to be found in the appendix that lists Old Boys.

The selection provided produces a roll call that ranges across: 22 saints and martyrs; a Gunpowder plotter; Titus Oates and Sir Roger Tichborne; three Carrolls, who, between them, were associated with the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the founding of the Archbishopric of Baltimore; Joseph Plunkett, martyred in a more recent cause in 1916; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; Joseph Bamford, *the* JCB; a host of euphonious Latin Americans, here represented by Manuel Romero de Terreros y Vincent, Marques de San Francisco; the current Director General of the BBC; and three members of the 2003 World Cup winning squad [rugby]. This selection omits many of those listed, including the seven O S holders of the Victoria Cross, about whom there is a separate section elsewhere in the book.

With such an eclectic mix of *alumni*, this is the history of an original institution. The core of the book is a scholarly account, written for the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the College. It may come as a surprise that an English Roman Catholic school can claim such longevity, so a good proportion of the text serves as a primer for the high points of early modern English and European History.

No doubt, several generations of Muir's pupils stimulated his research for this part of the story, as it weaves together the strands of mainstream history, the more obviously elusive recusant past of Lancashire, and the particular story of an institution that began in St Omer, shifted to Bruges, then to Liege, before finally settling in Lancashire, under Pendle,

with its particular associations with other matters of faith and belief. There the College came into being in a building fortuitously surplus to the needs of the Weld family, who found Lulworth Castle adequate for their purposes.

Because this is no commonplace story, on the way, the difficulties of the politics of the Spanish Netherlands, the origins of the Society of Jesus, and the unfolding of the English reformation and its aftermath, all have to be considered. This is a challenging brief, but it is brought off with some style, even though one suspects the author had footnotes in mind that do not appear in this edition.

The sources must have been challenging, if only because the migrations, the incidence of military intervention, occupation of premises, requisitioning, necessary subterfuge by an institution that was taken to be subversive in intention, that populate the narrative, must have destroyed much paperwork.

No wonder Titus Oates managed to get such mileage from his fantastical embroidery. One is left feeling there might be more to be said about the wonderfully named Father Thunder, Prefect of Discipline, or puzzling over why 'the Alexian Brothers brought in from the local madhouse' were unable to

handle the reaction of the pupils to the suppression of the Society in the late 18th century.

Contrasted with the theme of persecution is the development of an establishment institution. There was a tension in the development of Stonyhurst, between the Society and its mission, set against reliance, at key stages, on the patronage of well-connected Catholic aristocrats. The original hall and the spectacular development of it in the 19th century, given prominence in both text and illustrations, show the importance of cultivating the right setting, when the supporters of the school were classified still as renegades and ultramontane.

Nonetheless Shirk keeps cropping up in the narrative, claimed as the oldest 'temporary' school structure in the land, and there is a good deal about economies practised at various stages, often involving heating, or the lack of it. Fr Purbrick's inspired approach in 1876 to a building project might cause repercussions and a visit from the HSE if adopted now:

> 'He announced to the boys that they were at liberty to demolish the Eastern boundary wall of the Playground. At once goal-posts were employed as battering rams, and in ten minutes time the wall for its whole length lay flat on the ground.'

Stonyhurst boys seem to have been inclined to riot quite frequently in the 19th century, something that is attributed to the influence of the Irish contingent, often infected with Fenian influences. Boys rioted over poor food, with justification it seems from the evidence; they hid the improving religious books to be read out at mealtimes; they barricaded themselves in, and provoked the authorities in the usual manner – graffiti, groaning under cover of weight of numbers, vandalizing their surroundings. Liberal use of the ferula, expulsions and other disciplinary measures had little effect. A succession of rectors, five in the 1840s, failed to break the spirit, until the fifth, Fr Francis Clough, described as tough, took charge:

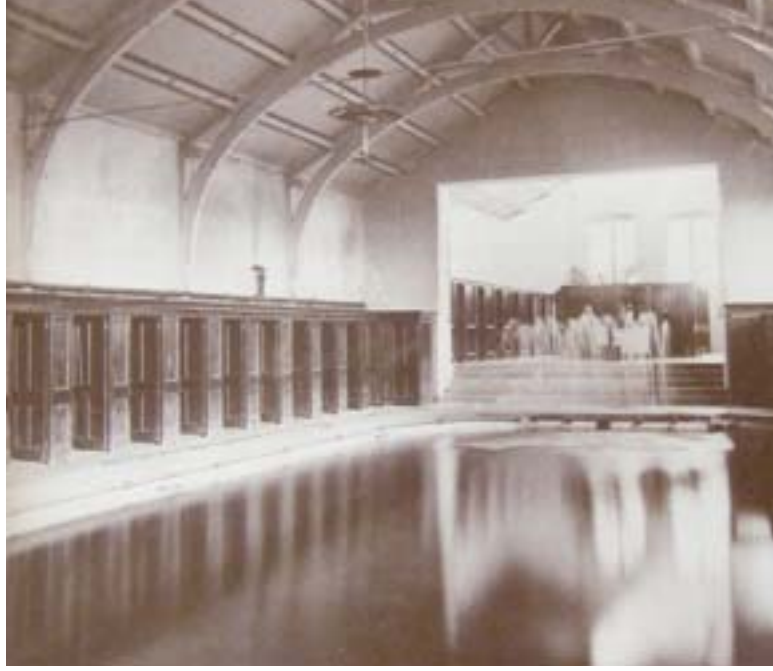
'When the boys habitually harassed the deer in the Park, he slaughtered the entire herd [deer presumably]; if smoking took place behind hedges, then the hedges were razed.'

For the general reader perhaps, as opposed to the Stonyhurst family, the idiosyncrasies of the system are especially striking. Unlike its 19th century competitors, the College developed along routes of its own. The non-conformist background and the training of priests for the Society's wider mission produced an interesting tension in academic terms.

On the one hand, the needs of the Gentleman Philosophers and the Novitiate allow G M Hopkins into the story, as well as an account of the cutting edge contribution of the Stonyhurst Observatories to the development of astronomy and meteorology, earning the College international recognition in these fields. On the other hand, no secret is made of the fact that, in academic terms, the college was often 'bottom heavy'.

The Ratio Studiorum, laid out by St Ignatius Loyola himself, and the Playroom system, employed instead of the house structure, seem to have blended strands of educational approaches well suited to achieving middling goals. Even so there are some strikingly modern features that would appeal to OFSTED:

'The Ratio required the Prefect of Studies to visit each class once every 15 days and in addition scrutinise the records kept by its master. There was a most elaborate system of exams, on the basis of which the Prefect of Studies assigned places in every



class… Those who failed were expected to revise in the Study Place and take a second examen at the start of the new term.'

Dullards forfeited the holidays therefore. Reward policies were prominent. 77 prizes in 1848 had increased to 123, when the Taunton Commission looked at the College in 1865. The pupil population in 1864 appears to have been 192, so not quite prizes for all. As 111 of them were awarded for prowess at Classics, it seems clear where the emphasis fell in academic terms when the mid-Victorian cult of the public school started to take off.

Stonyhurst flourished, as did many other 'public schools' in this period. The Great Rebuilding was a consequence, well documented in this account and drawing on a rich vein of sources. The enthusiasm with which the College embraced the OTC not only explains the VCs but also provided the College with a route into the heart of the Imperial establishment, of considerable assistance to its further development into the twentieth century. But, as Muir argues, the rebuilding produced its own challenge:

> 'With the completion of the South Front the Jesuits at last got what they wanted: modern purpose built facilities incorporating the latest educational devices of the day. But there is a limit to the size of any building that can be conveniently managed… Henceforth they would have to wrestle with the far trickier problems of renovation and renewal.'

The final chapter, added by others, catalogues the challenges, for the most recent era, of this legacy. It also contains significant references to recent judgments by teams of inspectors. Presumably these are in response to Muir's second line of argument about the Great Rebuilding:

> 'The new south Front concealed an even more insidious danger. If you have the perfect building there is nothing left to do. The temptation is to sit back, rest on the laurels of the past, and simply keep the machine "ticking over". Long ago Northcote Parkinson posited a connection between the completion of a great headquarters and the decay of the organization it served.'

One final theme binds these issues together in some respects. For some, personal knowledge of Stonyhurst will be limited to 'away matches'. The chapter on Sports and Pastimes catalogues an intriguing set of activities unique to Stonyhurst – Handball, Trap Ball, Stonyhurst Cricket, Stonyhurst Football, Second Bounce – sufficiently exotic as to need a glossary of terms in

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their own right. In the later nineteenth century these gave way to more orthodox competitive games, and fixtures against other schools developed.

The Great Rebuilding had an imposing effect on those visitors, and thus contributed to the growth of the formidable sporting reputation, reflected in the modern entrants in the listing of Old Boys. Personally, rather vivid memories returned when reading about the Plunge, 'one of the first indoor-heated swimming pools to be built in a school' when it opened in 1880.

Close examination of the excellent photograph, on p137, suggests it had not altered much 90 years later, and reminded of how difficult it was to perform a successful tumble turn at the curved Roman bath end. Thus, the photograph of the 1987 replacement confirms that the modern Stonyhurst has addressed the Northcote Parkinson connection with significant determination.

For those who have experienced an upbringing at Stonyhurst, there will be much to attract them here. Those interested in the history of printing will note the revival of the St Omer's Press, publisher of this handsome new edition, takes the link back to the original 1608 printing press, established to support the Counter Reformation fightback in England, by the Society of Jesus. For others, Muir's Stonyhurst presents an intriguing story, with wide ranging strands that connect it to 'proper' history.

Neil Boulton is Director of Studies at Bryanston.

HERE & THERE

Hereford Cathedral School's Ghachok Project

Since 1997, Hereford Cathedral School has been supporting Shree Sharada School in the village of Ghachok, standing in the shadow of the mighty Machhapuchre (Fish Tail) mountain which reaches to almost 7000 metres, the only mountain in Nepal that the authorities will not permit mountaineers to climb as it is classified as the Holy Mountain.

The Ghachok committee's main concern is not to interfere with the idyllic life style within the village, but somehow enhance daily life without thrusting the villagers into the twenty-first century. The project operates on a trickle feed system based on priorities gleaned from our annual treks and after discussions with the school staff and the village elders.

Since 1998 money has been provided for new classrooms and the salaries of two teachers. In addition there has been finance for computers and for a perimeter wall to be built around the school campus. All classrooms now have a hardened floor (cement, rather than mud), proper furniture, cupboards and boards for writing on.

After a meeting with the school staff during the October 2006 trek, we agreed to cover the cost of a new ablution block and to fund a second storey to house the Headmistress's office and create a staff common room.

We are now waiting to hear whether charity status will be granted to our project, which will help our fund raising in the future. Anyone who is interested in this and would like further information can contact Mike Moffatt (Chairman, Ghachok Committee) on either 01432 363539 or by email on templarmjm@yahoo.co.uk

Amy Watsonian

George Watson's College
An Illustrated History
By Les Howie

The history of George Watson's College in Edinburgh is a remarkable one. It was effectively founded in 1738, although George Watson himself had actually died 15 years earlier. It opened in 1741 with 11 boys aged between nine and ten. It is now, I believe, the single largest school in HMC, co-educational with over 2200 pupils from four-and-a-half to 18. But it has not simply been a tale of steady expansion over a quarter of a millennium. Its history has been punctuated by positively seismic upheavals.

George Watson left his money for the founding of a 'Hospital'. The word was then used in the sense of 'hospitality' which entailed the provision of board and lodging. Watson's was, therefore, by the terms of its endowment, necessarily a boarding establishment.

Oddly enough, Watson was not himself a member of the Merchant Company, but he specifically willed that his Hospital should be founded under their auspices because he felt that that would be the best way to ensure its success; in that you have to say he was spectacularly right! For 120 years or so, the Hospital fulfilled the wishes of its founder by providing 'hospitality' and education for boys who were sons of merchants who had fallen on hard times.

Quite remarkably, the Hospital assumed a degree of responsibility for them until the age of 25. It found them apprenticeships, gave them allowances and even paid them a bonus provided that they did not get married without the approval of the Merchant Company before that age. I wonder how modern governing bodies would feel if that obligation were to be placed on them today!

The first and by far the biggest upheaval in the life of Watson's occurred in 1871. For some time they had suffered from a novel problem. They had too much money! There was a strong feeling in the country that the vast sums of money which rich merchants such as Watson, George Heriot and Robert Gordon in Aberdeen, had left to found schools were not being put to best use.

In a nutshell, the terms of the relevant wills, because of the restrictions of who could benefit, were actually working against the wishes of the founders. That, at least was the argument; whether the founders would have agreed with what happened next is an entirely different question!

Successive Government Commissions and reports such as the Newcastle Commission in England and the Argyll Commission in Scotland, had made it clear that they thought that there was a great deal of money not being put to good use and, perhaps, the threat of Government take-over hung in the air.

The Merchant Company moved their feet remarkably quickly. They commissioned a report into their schools in 1868 and used it to add their voice to the clamour for reform, but on their own terms. A new Act went through Parliament allowing the use of the endowments for day pupils and by 1871 the Hospital School had become simply a boarding house and the newly named George Watson's College had opened with an impressive 800 boys on the roll. At the same time George Watson's College for Ladies was opened, on a different site, with an equally impressive 500 girls.

Fast forward 60 years and we come to the next dramatic upheaval in the life of George Watson's. The boys' College was moved. The City itself had expanded and its current site was no longer suitable, having no further scope for development, so the Merchant Company purchased a green field site and built a brand new school, which opened in 1932.

Meanwhile, the Ladies' College was also thriving. It too was right in the heart of the City. It had expanded by buying up nearby houses as they became available but there was a limit to what could be achieved this way. This led eventually to the third major upheaval. In 1974 the two schools merged to form a new, combined, school on the boys' site creating the George Watson's College we see today.

And so to Les Howie's Illustrated History of the College. How to describe this book? I suppose that any writer of a school history must first decide who his or her 'audience' is to be and must then decide on the appropriate approach to the task. The result, in all too many cases, is a narrative history which will appeal only to a comparatively few dedicated supporters of the school in question.

Les Howie's approach is much more imaginative. In effect he has produced not one but two books in the same volume. The first is indeed a narrative history but presented rather after the style of a modern history text-book.

It is lavishly illustrated with photographs, architects plans, quotations from original sources such as minutes of meetings and recollections of early pupils with anecdotes on such diverse subjects as the food and school discipline. It also makes full use of varied layouts and fonts. Taken as a whole, it brings to life the story of this remarkable school.

Interwoven with this history is what seems to me to be a second enterprise, which both illuminates the first and serves another, quite different, purpose. This resembles nothing so much as an extremely thorough School Magazine covering 250 years.

There are the usual pen portraits of all the Headmasters and Headmistresses of the Boys', Ladies and Combined Colleges, profiles of other prominent and long serving members of staff, team photographs and even occasional match reports, reports on the music department, the debating society and so on.

There are separate sections on Watson's during the two World Wars and on the Watsonian Club and eminent former pupils. These sections are likely to be of more interest to those who already have some connection with the College and will recognise at least some of the names. They can easily be read after the manner of a 'coffee-table' book by dipping into it and dotting about from topic to topic as the fancy takes you.

As this history ably demonstrates, the story of George Watson's College is one of success by any measurement. The size of the modern school and its impressive facilities are testimony to successive governors, while the achievements of generations of pupils, whether academic, sporting, cultural or otherwise provide powerful evidence of the quality of education.

Les Howie's book, which demonstrates an enormous amount of research and is clearly a labour of love, does justice to all of this in a way that a more conventionally presented school history might not have been able to do.

Ian Templeton is a former Warden of Glenalmond College.

A last journey

In the year before he died, John Rae completed three books. Here follows the introduction to one of them, *The Agnostic's Tale*

I am not sure when I gave up trying to believe in the existence of God but it was about 25 years ago when I was in my late forties. At the time I was the head master of Westminster School and regularly took school services in Westminster Abbey.

I saw nothing wrong in conducting Christian services when I was no longer a believer. It wasn't as if I had become an atheist; I had just ticked the box marked 'Don't know' and left it at that. Over the ensuing years I must have given thought to whether life had any meaning and whether death would be the end, but I cannot remember worrying or even caring very much.

I might have continued in this state of indifference for the rest of my life if it had not been for a chance meeting with the writing of Umberto Eco and it was his 'restless incredulity' that made me realise how equivocal and intellectually lethargic my agnosticism was.

It happened in January 2004, when we were staying with our daughter and her family in Wilton, Connecticut. The eastern seaboard of the United States was in the grip of winter, with freezing temperatures and deep snow drifts. Each morning, when the snow ploughs had cleared the roads, my wife and daughter went shopping and on this occasion I asked them to drop me off at the vast warehouse-like bookstore that had a coffee shop attached.

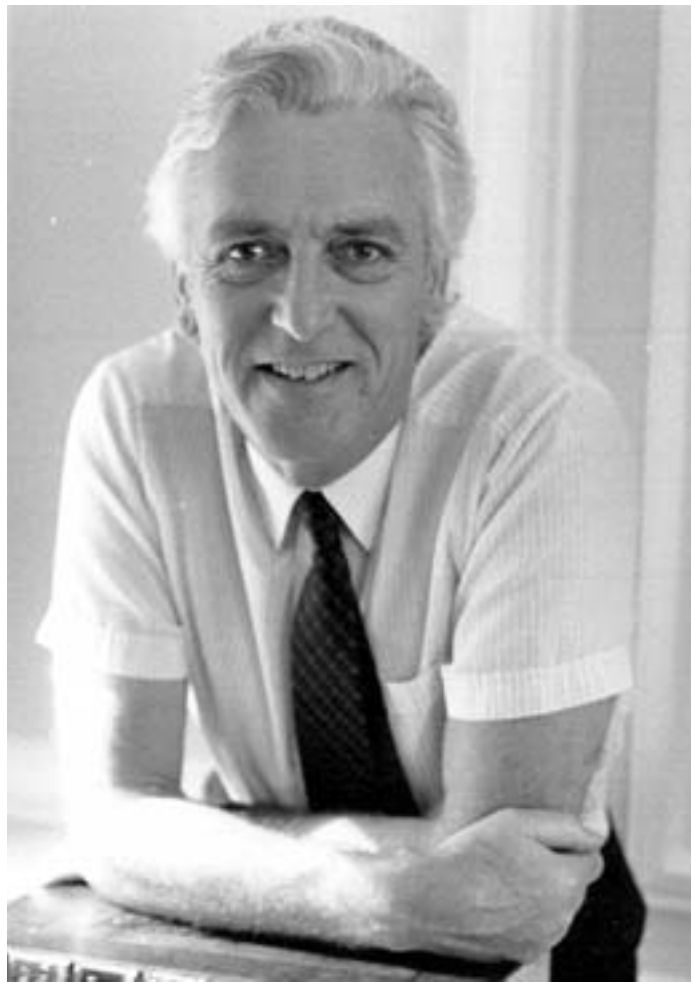
I had no book in mind but, as I wandered along the shelves looking for something to read, with my cappuccino, I spotted a small paperback entitled *Belief or Non-belief: a dialogue*. The dialogue, which originally appeared in the form of letters in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, was between Carlo Maria Martini, the Archbishop of Milan, and the philosopher, novelist and agnostic, Umberto Eco. I was intrigued and, taking the book with me to the coffee shop, I started to read.

As the argument went back and forth with each letter, I found myself excited by the debate I had opted out of. Does history's trajectory give human beings any cause to hope that life is not just a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing? Is there a notion of hope (and of our responsibility to the future) that could be shared by believers and non-believers? Is it possible to sustain ethical values without a belief in God?

The more I read, the more absorbed I was by the way the Roman Catholic Cardinal and the agnostic philosopher sought for the common ground without compromising their belief and non-belief, but the crucial revelation for me was the nature of Eco's agnosticism, a restless incredulity that was far removed from my shoulder-shrugging 'Don't know'.

I don't think I knew there and then that I would no longer be content with my form of agnosticism, but over the next few weeks I read the dialogue again several times and experienced the same excitement, so that by the early spring I was impatient to take up the challenge it had thrown down.

If I wanted to call myself an agnostic, I would have to find



a way to shock or shake my agnosticism into something approaching restless incredulity. And the sooner the better. Like many people of my age – I was 73 in March 2004 – what I feared most was not death but senility and I remembered Marcus Aurelius's warning, 'Get on with the pursuit of truth before the mind starts to wander'.

I was pretty sure that pursuing the truth of what I believed or did not believe about the existence of God was not something that could be done by reading. The few modern books on theology I had dipped into I had found almost impossible to understand.

Modern theologians, I thought, use more and more obscure and impenetrable language to disguise the fact that they are less and less convinced of the reality of God's existence, but if I talked to believers face to face, as well as to atheists and fellow agnostics, I would be able to ask, "What exactly do you mean by that?"

So I conceived the idea of setting out on a journey to meet men and women who by the nature of the life they had chosen or the knowledge and insights I thought they possessed, seemed likely to be able to help me.

When I started, I did not know where my journey would

end. I might still be an agnostic though hopefully of a much more restless kind, or I might discover that I was not an agnostic at all, just a believer who had lost his way or an atheist who refused to admit as much even to himself. I did not plan the whole journey in advance but, after the first few stages, followed wherever my need for better understanding led me.

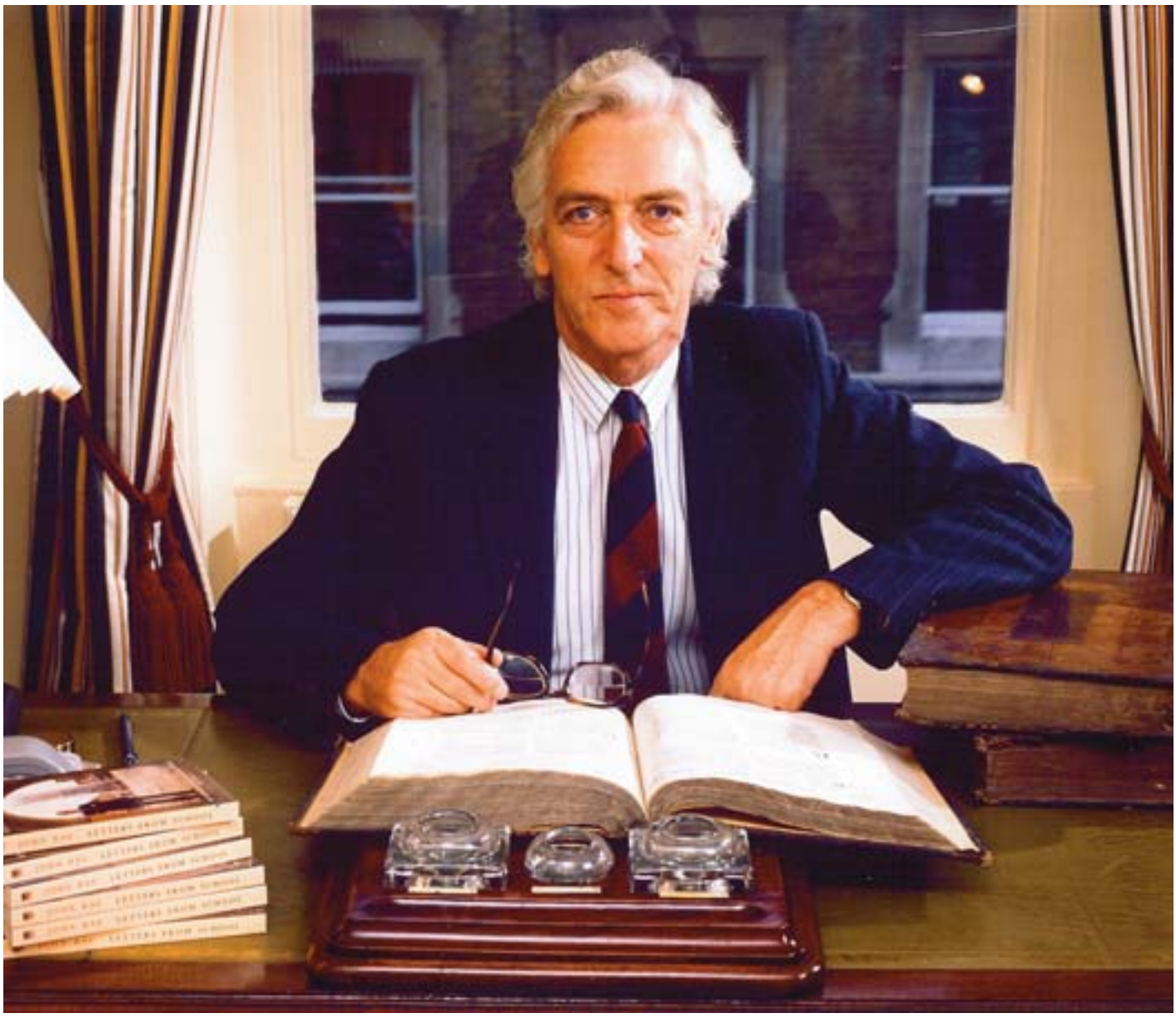
I was brought up as a Christian and have been close to Christianity all my adult life, but I am not a theologian. Not long ago a man came up to me after a dinner and said: "I shall always remember your sermon on the transfiguration".

As I had no idea what the transfiguration was, he had clearly mistaken me for someone else. I knew enough, however, to ask Christians to tell me exactly what they believed about the nature of God and the divinity of Christ. I did not want them to try to convert me (though two did), just to help me understand what their faith meant to them.

I was not sure what to do about the other world religions, whether to exclude them altogether or to risk the misunderstandings that would almost certainly follow a crash course in someone else's culture. In the end, I decided to look for an individual who had a profound understanding of the world's religions, not just an academic qualification in comparative religion. What I wanted to know was whether the other great world religions offered me an alternative way of understanding the word God and, if they did, whether I would still call myself an agnostic.

This book is a record of my journey. It is a fragment of autobiography describing the year – roughly from the summer of 2004 to the summer of 2005 – when I set out to discover what I did or did not believe about God. To a professional theologian or philosopher I am sure it will appear superficial or muddled or both but it is not intended to be a book about theology or philosophy, just a personal account of what happened, of how people answered my questions and what I made of their answers.

I am very grateful to all the men and women who were willing to see me. Without exception they were welcoming and generous with their thoughts and time. My greatest debt is to my wife, Daphne. Without her help I would never have met some of my most rewarding contacts. As a Roman Catholic, she must have had reservations about this project, but she supported me throughout and for this I am especially grateful.



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