



ABINGDON

From the Head: Miss O.F.S. Lusk, B.Mus

Friday 13 January 2012

Dear Parents, Colleagues, Boys and Governors,

Welcome back to Abingdon for the Lent Term and Happy New Year to everyone. I hope that you all had an enjoyable break and, having by now cleared away the debris of Christmas, are buoyed up and ready for the challenges of 2012.

Mock exams have begun in earnest for 5th Year, and Sixth formers have been involved in some retakes. This is a short term which simply means trying to fit everything in within a shorter period. The boys are already very busy with their day-to-day lives at School.

The admissions season is underway once more and later this month we will welcome a record number of applicants for places in the 1st Year this coming September. Boarding also continues to be very strong indeed and I have now taken the decision to close the lists for September.

At the end of last term we farewelled a number of colleagues.

After 23 years loyal and dedicated service Mr David Pope decided to leave Abingdon School at the end of the Michaelmas term, in order to take up new challenges and opportunities. I would like to thank David for his long and loyal service to Abingdon. The School will miss his energy and dedication. I wish him well for the future.

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Mr Mark Forth has now taken up the post of Head of Chemistry at Haileybury, an excellent promotion for him. Mark will be remembered in particular for his contribution to the Other Half, most recently leading the trek to Mount Kilimanjaro.

Miss Julie Le Belhomme has moved to take up a position at Highgate School and I thank her for her contribution to the Modern Languages Department.

Mr Jack Lattimore, Sports Assistant, has returned to Australia where he will attend University.

Mrs Jan Glover, Development Director, decided to leave Abingdon School at the end of December in order to pursue other opportunities. I wish her well for the future.

This term I am pleased to welcome the following colleagues to Abingdon:

Mr Daniel O'Dell – Carpenter

Mr Matthew Feates, ICT Technician.

Mr Gareth Callan has returned to our Chemistry Department after spending a year at St Peter's School, York.

Mrs Lois Glenn-McKibbin returns to the MFL Department after maternity leave.

Mr Stephen Randall is our new Sports Assistant.

Mr Steve Ball is working in the Science School as a Lab Technician.

Mrs Helen Whitworth is teaching PSHE part-time on a temporary basis.

I hope that all settle in well and enjoy their time at the School.

When I wrote to you in December we were about to embark on the final week of term. That week was filled with numerous events which were enjoyed by all and, as ever, the boys continued to clock up achievements in many fields. A highlight was the Boarders' Christmas Chapel and Dinner. This is always a wonderful occasion with just the right balance of formality and the ritual of inter-house rivalry. Alexander Lee, Simon Spafford and Paul Woo each gave stirring speeches on the achievements (and otherwise) of their houses. It's pleasing too to note the generous praise and thanks extended by the boarders to their matrons, tutors, support staff and everyone who contributes to the quality of the boarding experience.

The last few days of term saw a flurry of chess activity. On Monday 12 December with inter-house Sports Competitions including chess for the first time, Davies' House, led by Alexander Lee, won. Then four of these same players, Alexander Lee, Omri Faraggi, Edward Reynolds and Rafi'i al-Akiti, lined up to face Cumnor Chess Club's top team in the Oxford and District Chess League and helped defeat them convincingly 4.5-1.5. Finally the Lower School and Middle School knockout tournaments were concluded. Joseph Truran won the Lower School Trophy and Edward Reynolds won the Middle School trophy. Edward Reynolds' feat of chess endurance was particularly impressive. He won two of his four games in the House Chess, won his game against Cumnor in the evening, and the next afternoon won the Middle School Trophy.

The final day saw the annual School Christmas Service at St Helen's Church. The brass certainly beefed up the organ accompaniment to the carols, the choir added much to the occasion and the Revd. Professor John Barton, Dept. of Theology, Oxford University, delivered the sermon.

Special mention must be made of the soloists in the Christmas concerts, Toby Marlow (vocals) with the Big Band, George Burrage (violin) in Vivaldi's "*Spring*" and Joe Ereaut performing Grieg's Piano concerto. Stunning performances all round.

"*Cabaret*", the joint production with SHSK, saw particularly impressive performances from Will Abell, Toby Marlow and Chris Young. Drama certainly featured extensively during the term. No fewer than seven productions were staged, involving over a hundred senior pupils here and at St Helen's and covering almost every genre: opera, music theatre, Shakespeare and the most contemporary of modern drama. The drama festival was a hugely impressive feat of organization with five plays a night in different parts of the Arts Centre. Shakespeare's "*Cymbeline*" boasted a cast of 12 led by Henry Jenkinson; Neil Labute's "*The Shape of Things*" was an intense chamber piece featuring Charlie Bateman and Joe Westcott; Craig Taylor's "*One Million Tiny Plays About Britain*" gave Will Nash, Johnny Ainslie and Oliver Bailey a chance to show off their versatility; Alecky Blythe's verbatim plays "*Come Out Eli*" and "*Cruising*" gave opportunities to another dozen Abingdonians, prominent among whom were Harry Wilder, Tom Sishton and Gabriel and Johnny Burrow. This term will bring opportunities for those in Middle and Lower Schools.

The Kids' Lit Quiz team "Abingdon 1" did particularly well on their 2nd position out of 37 teams at the recent Regional Heat, beaten by 1½ points. Well done to Alex Ainslie, John Christian Davey, Sebastian Jeffreys and Sam Wilmot.

Congratulations are extended to the rugby U15As on recording an undefeated season in all regular fixtures. They finished the season by overcoming a physical Marlborough side 17-7. Other highlights of the season included beating an also undefeated RGS Guildford side 38-10 and St Paul's 31-7 in front of Shaun Edwards. Special mention should go to Michael Dewar for being awarded player of the season and Ross Cook for most improved.

The karate club held its termly grading, conducted by former World Champion Bob Rhodes. A number of novices graded to 9th grade, with Martin Yip, Alex Wallis-Smith and Lewis Spring grading to 7th grade. Ben Passey, Sam Wilmot, James Kennedy, Jeremy Lyons, James Telford and Austin Andrews gained 6th grade and Angus Wilson-MacDonald graded 3rd grade. Special commendation

goes to James Jefferies, who surpassed the criteria for 9th grade and was double graded from novice to 8th grade.

The U16 hockey team were crowned indoor and outdoor Independent Schools League Champions, winning the indoor tournament.

The badminton club continued its unbeaten run this term with victories over schools such as Wellington, Cheltenham, Bromsgrove, Rugby and Stowe. Both our U14s and U16s are through to the county round of the national schools' championship, with the U16s producing a particularly impressive display against some tough opposition. Congratulations to all those involved and particular thanks to Nick Topping who, as the captain of badminton, has led the team this term with distinction.

At the final assembly I gave out 60 colours ties which was quite a marathon in itself. Full and half colours were awarded for chess, sailing, rowing, rugby, The Martlet, community service, music, CCF and drama.

The inter-house competitions went very well indeed featuring badminton, chess, rugby 7s, squash, swimming and table tennis. Top results: U18 Davies', U16 Franklin's, U15 1st= Christodoulou's and O'Doherty's, with Davies' declared the overall winning house.

When most of us were looking towards the great British wind down over Christmas, boys and colleagues were out and about on a number of expeditions.

The 1st XI hockey team travelled down to Kent for three days before the start of term, to play against Cranbrook School and take part in the Eltham College tournament. This trip has become an established part of the 1st XI's preparation for the season and provides the team with a good deal of pitch time and match practice, ahead of the first fixture against Marlborough which they won 4-1.

The 1st XI showed significant improvements throughout the three days and have returned with a greater level of organisation and improved match fitness. They now look forward to challenging themselves against the other seven schools in the Independent Schools Hockey League and start the season with a good deal of confidence.

Over New Year the cross country club visited Portugal to train with Phillip Hatzis (OA) and his company Tri Training Harder. Sixth form and fourth year squad members were tested in a variety of sessions which included track work, tempo runs, hill training and beach running. This was complemented by strength, conditioning and core work, followed by ice baths and stretching sessions every day. As well as running, varied classroom sessions were on offer including video analysis, nutrition presentations and racing strategies. Huge improvement was noted over the five days, especially in the younger years, and the squad left Portugal a more cohesive unit.

To relax after a hard day's training runners were able to use the facilities of the 5 star resort across the road. The spa was popular with the sixth form, and played a crucial role in their recovery, while the younger boys were able to use the pool. Trips to the beach and local marina in Vilamoura, as well as sight seeing in the castle town of Silves allowed the team to socialise and get to know each other, which helped make living in shared apartments a more cooperative and positive experience.

Four intrepid boys braved the winter weather for a few windy days sailing in a deserted Plymouth Sound. That said, it was actually rather mild, but still a far cry from the idyllic Mediterranean yachting most would associate with the sport. After an evening acclimatisation sail to identify the seemingly countless navigational lights of the Sound, the crew retired for their first night on-board, forecasts of strong winds ringing in their ears. They weren't disappointed, and the next two days of man-overboard drills, using a float (not the youngest crewmember), navigation tests and seamanship skills were indeed a lively but rewarding affair. 'Pontoon bashing', a misleading term which actually involves coming alongside

pontoons very carefully and remarkably slowly, finished the trip. Windswept but still smiling, all headed back to Abingdon dreaming of the next trip or possibly just a nice hot shower and central heating.

The last day of the Michaelmas term saw a group of 20 third year boys accompanied by 3 members of staff leaving for Paris straight after the Church service, with Chapel choir boys making a quick change into holiday clothes. The group travelled by coach down to Folkestone and over to France on Eurostar, to arrive at their hotel, nicely situated between Paris and Disneyland. Visits in Paris included the Musée des Arts et Métiers, the Christmas market on the Champs-Élysées, the Eiffel Tower and a cruise on the Seine. The following day was spent in Disneyland Paris. A thoroughly good time was had by all.

On December 14th 22 cadets, 4 staff and 3 instructors left for the annual CCF ski trip to Wengen, Switzerland. Unfortunately the first two days saw very little snow, which made skiing impossible, but they were able to enjoy ice-skating and an afternoon on the largest indoor high ropes course in Europe. On day three they woke up to vast amounts of beautiful snow and at last they were able to get skis on! Four days of superb ski conditions followed in Mürren and all three ski groups (beginners, intermediate and advanced) made some superb progress. A particular well done goes to Sam Law, James Baker and Ben Thompson who were chosen to be the most improved skiers in each of the three groups.

The Jay Peak Ski tour went to the east coast of America, to Jay Peak in Northern Vermont. Anxious viewing of the snow reports proved well founded and they arrived in the resort to find only three runs open. While the beginners were fine with their one easy run, the more advanced skiers found the conditions limiting. More snow arrived later in the week; however, ski conditions remained disappointing by the standards set over the past few years. On a much more positive note, the 5 star hotel was a real treat, with food and service to match. The water park 2 minutes' walk away was dramatic with slides, pools hot tubs and indoor surfing: a state of the art entertainment which had only been open for a month. After 5 days skiing they travelled back down to Boston and then spent

an entertaining day in Downtown Boston before catching the plane back to Heathrow.

On all trips out I'm very pleased to report that the boys' behaviour was exemplary. This is always very important, I believe, particularly as the School relies on the goodwill of the Common Room to make these expeditions possible. My thanks to all colleagues who accompanied the boys:

Mr John Chapman

Mrs Eleanor Kaye

Mrs Jane Mansfield

Mr Andy Loughe

Miss Julie le Belhomme

Mr Alf Mansfield

Mr Nick O'Doherty

Mrs Emily O'Doherty

Mr Leo Dudin

Mr Ian Middleton

Mr Steve Brenchley

The term will be as busy as ever and I wish everyone a fulfilling and purposeful term.

Felicity Lusk