



ABINGDON

From the Headmaster: M. Turner, M.A.

Newsletter 8 – 2009-10

May 2010

Dear parents,

Since my last letter to you there have been momentous changes. A new coalition Government has been elected, Parliament has re-convened and the Queen has delivered her speech. It is fascinating to see that once again education is at the very top of the agenda, and the priority is for a reinvigorated Department for Children Schools and Families (already renamed Department for Education!). All the talk is of empowering schools and school leaders, reducing the burden of government restriction and the transfer of the right to open new schools to parents and other interested bodies. It will be interesting to see how the educational agenda changes from here. I have been asked repeatedly how Abingdon will fare in this climate. I am very confident that we are well placed to negotiate whatever challenges are placed in front of us. Indeed, much of what the new coalition government says gives cause for cautious optimism regarding our ability to take responsibility ourselves for the quality of teaching and learning that takes place within our curriculum, and further measures to hand back decision-making to the local level. Will a proliferation of other independent schools and academies cause greater competition to Abingdon? The answer to that question is possibly yes. Nevertheless, we have always embraced competition as a way of raising expectations, galvanising internal systems of quality control, and providing a cutting edge to our desire to develop Abingdon still further.

In contrast to speculation about the future, I was recently at a function at the newly-refurbished (£65 million) Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The magnificent new display space, striking architecture and wonderful facilities make this an important venue for Abingdonians to visit over the course of the next year or so. I was also struck by the fact that at the heart of the massive new display area is the minuscule King Alfred's Jewel, arguably one of the most important archaeological relics ever found in the UK. It is splendid to think that this wonderful educational resource is now even better placed to communicate its many messages to an ever-wider audience. I recommend it to you.

Row to Henley. I am delighted to take this opportunity to thank all those who supported my efforts, both financially and morally, in rowing from the Abingdon Boat House to Henley. For me it is a real achievement to be able to say that I have rowed the Henley course! The 43 miles would never have been covered without sterling support from a team of individuals who kept the boats on the water, managed to negotiate the sometimes complex issues of jostling with barges to go through locks, and who planned the celebrations on arrival at Henley. I am pleased to say that through combined efforts the target of raising £8,000 for a new coxless 'pair' has been achieved.

Eyjafjallajökull Volcano. Many of you may have seen something that amounts to a 'disclaimer' published on the School website. We have had a very firm statement from examination boards that

exams will not be rescheduled as a result of potential travel disruption due to volcanic ash. Although the threat of disruption to air travel seems to have receded dramatically over the last few days, we must advise long-haul travellers that any risk to their return journeys and consequent impact on examinations must be shouldered by them as individuals.

Congratulations to David McGill and his wife Liz on the birth of their second daughter, Tess Mary McGill.

Academic Matters

Fifth years: activity after exams. Fifth year boys do not return to school after the completion of their last examination, but obviously there is a significant degree of variation in that last date depending on a boy's subject choice. We strongly encourage all fifth year boys to participate in some form of work experience in the very long holiday after examinations and before the start of the new academic year in September. Those who still feel they need advice on this should contact Dr Gibbs on 01235 849003.

Book collection. As previously advertised, the final deadline for 5th and U6th book returns will be Saturday 3 July. Books not returned by that date will be charged to bills. Many departments will already have made clear to boys the occasions on which they can return books and it seems that Monday 28 June will be a particularly good time for boys to be thinking about this as, for most, it will be the last day of exams.

Collecting Statements of Results. The Charles Maude Room will be open for collection of statements of results on the following days

A/AS results Thursday 19 August GCSE results Tuesday 24 August

The doors will open at 8.30 am and results will be available until noon. A number of members of staff will be present to offer congratulations and advice if needed.

For A Level candidates needing post-results services urgently and for requests of photocopied scripts, the Exams Office will be available to deal with these issues. Candidates should bring a cheque-book with them when ordering any of these services. All other post-results services will be dealt with at the beginning of the Michaelmas term. A sheet explaining the post-results services available will be included in the pack provided.

Candidates who are going to be on holiday overseas may leave an email address with the Exams Office. Candidates on holiday in the UK may phone in for results, but should be aware that the lines are going to be very busy.

01235 849035

Exams Office

Lower Sixth Induction. All of those fifth years who will be returning next year into the sixth form are reminded that there will be a Lower Sixth Induction Day running from 9.00 am on Monday 6 September. Buses will not run on this day so it is wise to prepare your travel into school ahead of time; we expect to finish at about 4.30 pm. Academic options for the sixth form will take place on that day too. Boarders will therefore need to return a day earlier than planned if coming into the Lower Sixth.

Leavers' Service - 9.30 am on Saturday 3 July in St Michael's Church, Park Road. This is always a special and memorable service, as we say farewell to those leaving school. The more leavers and their families, the more special and memorable it will be. Do come!

Lower Sixth Subject Choices: At the time of writing, all clashes have been resolved and boys in next year's Lower Sixth will be able to pursue the A levels of their choice. However, many sets are now at levels that we would consider to be 'full' and so any boy who wishes to apply for a change in his subject choice should contact the Director of Studies, Dr Peter Willis, as soon as possible by email (peter.willis@abingdon.org.uk). Though we will always do our best to be accommodating, we do have to stress that changes may not be possible at this stage in particular subjects and it is certainly the case that the earlier we receive a request the greater likelihood there is of us being able to satisfy it.

Maths Olympiad. In this year's Intermediate Maths Olympiad – an invitation-only competition open to those scoring well in the Intermediate Maths Challenge – eight of our boys earned merits and two did even better and were awarded medals. Tom Salt scored 49 out of 60, earning a gold medal and a book prize. He came 11th out of all the participants in the country and has been invited to attend the UKMT Training Camp this summer. Bernard Ng scored 40 out of 60, earning a bronze medal.

Schools Challenge. Abingdon's team won the plate competition in the national finals of this general knowledge competition. In the first round Abingdon was drawn against Westminster School, the defending champions. The contest was nip and tuck, both teams led at some stage of the quiz but Westminster led at 'time', 860 points to 760.

This meant that Abingdon entered the Plate competition where a narrow victory over the Perse School by 690 points to 710 took us to the Plate final against Bury Grammar School. The match was won in fine style by Abingdon, 880 points to 490.

Chess Challenge. On 3 May, ten Abingdon boys competed in the county stage ('Megafinal') of the UK Chess Challenge tournament at Wellington College. In the past two years the School has had two qualifiers for the next stage, the 'Southern Gigafinal'. This year there were five Abingdon qualifiers and three of these boys won trophies: Richard Slade, boys U18, Jeffrey Yu, boys U16, and Omri Faraggi, boys U15.

But most significantly, because the U15 to U18 tournaments, boys and girls, were all combined, Jeffrey Yu had the opportunity to play the best girl in this tournament nationally last year, Lateefah Messam-Sparks, and he drew! This is a fantastic result for the School. (He also drew against Anjelica Maria Ynojosa, who is the sister of Felix Ynojosa, the best junior in the entire country, who was the overall winner nationally last year and who won 6/6 in the U14 section yesterday, playing our Thomas Kelly in the first round.)

Dragon Boat Racing. On 9 May a squad of 21 upper sixth formers, headed up by prefect of charities, Richard Parkin-Mason, won the annual Abingdon Rotary Club Dragon Boat Competition. They beat previous winners Feelgood Fitness Gym, using timing and rhythm to make up what they lacked in strength, or more to the point, protein shakes. In a stunning performance that has since been coined 'the most exciting of Dragon Boat finals in Dragon Boating history' they also overcame the Thames Valley Police Force. However, more important than all the medals and trophies, they raised hundreds of pounds for the Helen and Douglas House hospices in the process.

Drama and Film

It has been a very busy half term with plenty of exciting new developments. *Stepping Out* saw the Abingdon Dance Project launch in style, with a Sunday afternoon programme of original

choreography by professional actor and dancer, Matthew Hawksworth OA. The dance numbers were performed by about 20 senior pupils from Abingdon and St Helen's, who shared the stage with a troupe of professional dancers from London, as well as three brave couples from the Abingdon Common Room who performed in the School's first Common Room 'Come Dancing Competition'. Staff contestants included Megan Bowdrey, Andrew Loughe, Su McRae and Robert Jeffreys, and after a keenly fought competition in which all three couples achieved a very high standard, Robert and his partner Tamsin Howells emerged victorious.

A week later, the Abingdon Film Unit Reunion Dinner was another new event that brought together around 60 people for a formal dinner to mark seven years of the AFU and nearly 100 films. As well as parents, current and former members of the AFU, also present were many of the professionals from the worlds of film and television that have made such a decisive contribution to the success of the Unit, including the Cannes Palme d'Or winner, Geoff Dunbar, Head of Sky News John Ryley, Managing Director of Lion Television Richard Bradley and of course, our lead tutors, Michael Grigsby and Joanna Harrison.

Next came the AFU's Annual Screening of new films. Eleven films - six documentaries and five animations - were presented, with highlights including Chris Mears, Chris Young and Michael Bicarregui's superb animation *A Dice with Death*; James Yan's excellent film *Living It*, about a man in Beijing who has been battling both the AIDS virus, and China's attitude towards it, and *One Foot on the Ground* by Matthew Copson, Tom Bateman and Will McDowell, the film about a young man's dreams of becoming a basketball player in Moldova, Europe's poorest country, which premiered at the National Film Theatre in March.

Finally, the third Abingdon-St Helen's Drama Dinner saw 70 people sit down together in the dining hall to discuss careers in theatre. Among the guests were professional actors, directors, producers and writers including Sir Jeremy Child, Triona Adams, Julius Green, Richard Howard, Peter Temple, Joe Harmston and Sally Nesbitt, who as well as telling us about her life as an actress was also able to share fascinating stories about the first ascent of Everest in 1953, led by her father, Lord Hunt.

Music

Recent Concerts. Concerts before half term have included those of the School Bands (7 May) and Orchestras (12 May). Audiences were treated to some wonderful playing, thanks, particularly, to a very strong group of leaving musicians in the Upper Sixth.

In the bands concert, solos were taken by Veeral Manek (percussion), Jack Tinker (trumpet), Mike Summers (guitar) and Joe Mason (piano); particularly memorable was a duet with the Big Band 'Me and My Shadow' - a tribute to Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jnr - sung by leavers Euan Campbell and Simon Balderson.

The orchestral concert featured the first in a batch of solo concerto performances given by Anthony Lloyd (piccolo), Alex Black (flute), Tom Wilson (tuba) and Alex Ereaut in Elgar's lovely Cello Concerto. Others will be featured in the Sheldonian Concert (25 June) - see below.

Concerts after Half Term. These include a Junior Scholars' Concert on the day we return (Monday 7 June), followed by a concert on 18 June featuring the School's Big Band, alongside the professional Oxford Big Colours Big Band. This will include items from two preparatory schools,

Abingdon and The Manor. It is sure to be a wonderful evening, so please apply early for tickets (from website or telephone 01235 849063).

Concert at The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, Friday 25 June. This end of year concert will showcase some of the school's most talented soloists and ensembles, including Big Band, First and Chamber Orchestras and School Choir. Our soloists will be Joe Mason (French horn), Jack Tinker and George Rossiter (trumpets), Caspian Mitchard (organ) and Adrian Lo (violin). A concert in which we say farewell to many – and one not to be missed. Please join us!

Orchestral Tour to USA 2011. The Director of Music will be writing this week to orchestral and band musicians with further details of the tour to USA, 2-10 April 2011. We hope that a positive response from parents will ensure that this tour becomes a reality. Concerts are planned for Boston, Washington and New York – where Senior Boarding Housemaster Will Phelps has been appointed Headmaster of the British School on the island of Manhattan.

Big Band CD Recording. On 5 and 6 July Big Band musicians are due to record their second CD (the last was in 1998). This is an exciting project, timed to immortalise the work of our gifted jazzers leaving this year. The CDs should be available next term in good time for Christmas!

Sport

Athletics. A hugely busy Athletics Club had four competitions in just over a week. On 11 May a strong group attended the Vale trials, most notably scooping the first three places in both the 1500m Senior final and the 100m Inters final. On 13 May all three full teams competed at Radley against four other schools, with the Inters team continuing their unbeaten season. On 15 May at Harrow these teams competed again. While the Inters were forced into third place by a very strong Harrow and Brighton, there was much individual glory, with school records broken by Niall Keown (11.3s in the Inters 100m), Tom Watkins (6:28.1 in the 2k steeplechase), Joe Kempton (1:57.5 in the Senior 800m), Alex Muir (4:11.7 in the 1500m) and the 4x100m Inters Relay team (46.7s). On 19 May, the U14 and U16 teams competed in the ESAA track & field cup at Iffley Road. Both teams won by a comfortable margin with 290 and 396 points, respectively. Both await news of regional final places.

Cricket. Congratulations to Nathaniel Watkins, on being listed second in *Wisden* in the 'Leading Bowlers in Schools Cricket' list, with 129 overs, 24 maidens, 36 wickets at an average of 8.72 runs per wicket.

The start of the summer term has seen Abingdon's cricketers complete an undefeated start in the cup competitions. The first XI have recently gone through the first four rounds of the new ESCA national 20/20 cup culminating in a win over Portsmouth Grammar School to be crowned the Southern Region champions. They will now await the winners of the South East group in what is officially the last 16 stage.

At U12, 13, and 14 levels our boys are now in the Oxfordshire county quarter finals with our talented U13 side through to the national ESCA Calypso Cup quarter finals. This progression came after an imposing 109 runs win over Warwick School. They will now await the winner of the tie between Loughborough Grammar School and Tupton School from Derbyshire.

Rifle Club. In May the school's shooting coach, Alan Smith, competed in the English Smallbore Union Championships held at Bisley. Shooting over 50m, he secured tenth place in England with a score of 585/600. He has now been asked to compete for the England civilian team and will be at the Ash ranges in a match against the Army and Police teams.

Oxfordshire Rifle Championships. On 16 May pupils from Abingdon shot in this year's Oxfordshire championships, competing against adult shooters. Ben Bryant, Tom Pugh and Jonathan Goves won the Symonds Bowl and Finn Ryley and Ben Bryant were the winners of the C/D class pairs. Individual results were as follows:

Mr Alan Smith (Shooting coach) 7th in Class A
Ben Bryant 2nd in Class D
Jonathan Goves 5th in Class D

Finn Ryley 2nd in Class C
Matthew Allison 4th in Class D
Luke Derrick 6th in Class D

Sailing. Try a Sail Day! If you would like to experience a sail come to Farmoor Reservoir on Saturday 26 June between 2.00 and 5.00 pm. Experienced Abingdon School sailors will be available to take you out for a trial sail on the reservoir; all members of the family are welcome. The cost will be £5. There also will be a BBQ and an opportunity to socialise and meet other parents and supporters of the Friends of Abingdon School Sailing Club. The cost of the BBQ and a drink is £5 for adults, £3 for children. To guarantee your sail and to help us with catering please fill in the form, using the link:

<http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dE5qZ1AwMFBKT0tGUXNCU25JdTlyVnc6MQ>

The Tennis Club's success has been led by the 1st VI this season, who have remained unbeaten in inter school fixtures, having lost only to Radley in the regional semi finals of the Aegon Cup.

After a solid opening weekend win against Magdalen College School, the team of Euan Campbell, Sam Murrell, Joel Morris, Jack Wilson, Josh Ridley and Giles Waterson have gone on to record a further six straight wins. The 8-1 margin against Stowe and St Edward's was as emphatic as it sounds and there was also an excellent win against Eton. With five of the six returning next year, there is a lot expected of this group of players.

After bypassing Henley College in the Aegon Cup, they went on to beat the Radley B team, with Giles Waterson and Joel Morris looking in great touch. In the semi-finals Abingdon was drawn against Radley A team and unfortunately suffered the only defeat of the term, losing the singles rubbers.

Water polo. The U18 water polo team won the English Schools' water polo Bowl competition held at Warwick School this afternoon. I use won a little sheepishly, as the other four schools we should have played in the tournament final dropped out, meaning that we won the title by default. However, we have a shield to be engraved and kept for the year, the boys all have gold medals, the record books will record Abingdon as winners, and it means Abingdon have a national title to defend next year.

Yours sincerely,

