



ABINGDON

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

Newsletter 1 2008-9

September 2008

Dear Parents,

The monotonous wind and rain (at least) on the North Devon coast was relieved on our return to Abingdon by the splendid Olympic extravaganza from Beijing. Although sadly OA Robin Bourne-Taylor in the men's pair did not win a medal, the daily diet of sporting success seemed to whet our appetites for the arrival of the new Sports Centre. Unfortunately this magnificent facility was not ready for the start of term, but I can report that there is now water in the pool and we are looking forward to opening ceremonies with our guest of honour Kate Hoey, ex-Minister of Sport, on Open Day Saturday 4 October. There will be a preview for sponsors and supporters on the evening of Friday 3 October.

To have a major new sports centre to enhance our provision of 'sport for all', and training facilities for our elite competitors, just as the euphoria from Beijing is being converted to anticipation for London 2012, is wonderful news and near-perfect timing.

If the feel-good factor from Beijing was not enough, the exam results certainly provided an extra tonic. Normally I find myself lavishing praise on our A Level candidates, who in the past have outshone their juniors at GCSE. This year the story was different. At A Level we enjoyed our third-best year ever; at GCSE records were broken at every level. The proportion of A*s increased by 9%. With re-marks it is expected that over 80% of entries will be in the A* or A category.

The real news is not about creeping percentages, but about the shining performance of some of our leading candidates.

- At A Level five chemists sitting Edexcel 9080 came in the top ten of 6421 candidates, the first time any school has had more than three.
- John Morgan (chemistry) and Harry Desmond (physics) were selected for the British Olympiad teams and achieved high levels of success in international competition.
- At GCSE, an amazing 25 candidates received tributes from their exam boards for being amongst the top ten.

Examination results

GCSE. Of the subjects taken at GCSE by the fifth form:

43.7 % A*	(34.7 % 2007)
79.1 % A* and A	(75.7 % 2007)

9 boys achieved a full complement of A* grades. Anthony Grieveson and Stuart Lonergan have been named as in the top ten for the Edexcel Graphic Design course (of 1,049 candidates)

A Level. Of the subjects taken at A Level by the Upper Sixth,

64% were awarded A grade
87% were awarded A or B grade

From a yeargroup of 135, 58 boys (43%) gained three or more A grades, 31 (23%) gained four or more A grades and 14 (10%) five or more.

At AEA, seven distinctions were awarded, three in Chemistry.

New staff. We are pleased to be able to welcome our contingent of new staff to reinforce Common Room. There have been some changes to existing responsibilities, too, as Paul Gooding moves to take over the position of Middle Master, and Alexis Christodoulou takes over as housemaster of what used to be Gooding's House.

Mr Richard Castle	Economics and business studies
Mr Owen Cobbe	Director of Rugby
Mr Daniel Freyhan	Maths
Dr Robert Jeffreys	Biology
Mrs Jayne Jennings	Head of Modern Languages
Mr Henry Morgan	Maths
Mrs Emily O'Doherty	Art
Mr Matthew Perriss	Geography (coming in January)
Mr Damian Shirazi	Master-in-charge of cricket
Mr Robin Southwell-Sander	Geography and religious studies
Mr Nick Stokes	Physics
Mr David Wickes	Upper Master and teacher of history
Dr Jan Wiekak	Maths
Mr John Winters	Maths

In addition, we have new language assistants: Qin Yang (Chinese), Mélanie Dufau (French), Kai Grädtke (German), Silvia Vidal Oriol (Spanish); and a new music assistant, Andrew Hall.

Congratulations are due to Dr Peter Willis and Tara, on the birth of their son, Kieran, on 9 July; and to Simon and Lucy Balderson, and Edward and Natasha Davies on their respective marriages during the summer holidays.

Academic Matters

Scholars' Induction took place on Saturday 6 September through a simple ceremony aimed at welcoming the new scholars to the School and awarding them their scholars' ties. Dr Burnand, Master of the Scholars, talked of the importance of 'living scholarship' encouraging boys to use their gifts and talents in a practical as well as a theoretical way.

The only set of exams for any year group this term is the lower sixth tests which will take place during lessons in the week beginning 17 November. We are not keen on suspending the teaching timetable to pursue endless mock examining so you will find that this is the only semi-formal set of exams the lower sixth will have before they sit the real exams in the summer. As such, we take the boys' performance in the tests seriously (as we hope they do!) and reserve the right to recall any boys who we feel have under-performed for resit exams on the day before the Lent Term begins. By the time of the tests the boys will be more than a third of the way through their AS courses and the results they achieve in November are useful early indicators of their likely grades in the summer.

January resits. Our current policy regarding resitting of AS exams in the January of a boy's upper sixth year is unchanged: upper sixth boys may sit up to a total of four units in the January session. All administration for this will be handled by the Exams Officer (Mrs Rebecca Cottam) and she will be issuing general guidance and instructions to the upper sixth before the end of September. Boys need to remember to balance their commitment to their A2 work with the work necessary to make January resits a successful venture; advice should be sought from tutors and heads of department before making entries. There is no limit on the number of units that upper sixth boys may

enter in the summer. We do not allow any other year group to enter for examinations in the January session.

Reporting. We are moving this year to a new reporting system. All year groups will have two reports this term: the first (to arrive with you during half term) will be of a brief nature, with each subject teacher giving a grade for effort and achievement alongside a short comment. Tutors and housemasters will then add their comments. The second report (arriving with you just after the end of term) will be of a longer nature, comprising grades again with longer comments, a review of Other Half activities and comments from tutor, housemaster and a senior member of staff. I myself will write a report on each boy in the School at least once in the year. As ever, any concerns you have in the meantime should be addressed in the first place to your son's tutor or, failing that, to his housemaster, though any member of staff is available to be contacted via email or telephone if that seems more appropriate.

Chapel. Everyone is welcome to join us in chapel on Thursdays at 6 o'clock. The visiting preachers for this term are as follows:

25 September	The Rev'd Canon Beaumont Stevenson, former Chaplain of Littlemore Mental Health Centre
9 October	Professor Chris Lavy, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre
16 October	The Rev'd Anthony Hogg, Vicar of Hanney

Edmund Society. Everyone is also welcome to the Edmund Society lectures, with questions, which last one hour. On Wednesday 1 October, at 7.30 pm in the Amey Theatre, General the Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, GCB, LVO, OBE, DL, talks on 'The Just War - are the traditions still relevant today?'; on Tuesday 21 October at 4.00pm in the Charles Maude Room, Mike Proudfoot, Department of Philosophy, Reading University, discusses 'The Intellectual Fallacy – are the intentions and biography of the artist relevant to determining the meaning and interpretation of a work of art?'; and on Tuesday 18 November at 4.00 pm in the Chapel, Jane Nicholson, icon artist, speaks about 'Icons – windows to heaven'.

Confirmation. Whether or not they have already been baptised, boys may be interested in being confirmed by a Bishop of the Church of England. This is an important occasion when they make promises to God, they are strengthened for their adult life as a member of the Church, and they receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. Boys can be confirmed either in a parish church or, after preparation in School, by a Bishop in the School Chapel on 19 March 2009 at 6.00 pm. Preparation involves weekly lunchtime meetings and visits to churches. All pupils who are interested in the possibility of being confirmed should meet in Chapel on Tuesday 23 September at 12.40 pm, or else see the Chaplain soon.

Trip to Moldova. At the start of the summer holiday a group of nine Abingdon sixth formers, accompanied by two girls from Our Lady's and three members of staff, travelled to the Eastern European country of Moldova in the latest stage of Abingdon's partnership with the charity Agape. There was time for some sight-seeing including a visit to Chisinau, the capital city, and the vast underground wine cellars of Milestii Mici, but the main focus of the trip was getting to know young Moldovans in the town of Ialoveni, and arranging activities for them. Highlights of the trip included teaching the Moldovans how to play cricket on the beach at Vadul lui Voda, setting up the Moldovan branch of the Abingdon Film Unit, and putting on a Moldovan Concert on the last night, which ended with a performance of a Moldovan dance, the Hora, by all of the Abingdon group, which made up for what it lacked in technical perfection through sheer energy and enthusiasm. All of the Abingdon pupils were excellent ambassadors and, as well as learning a great deal themselves from the trip, they have certainly helped Agape in its mission to 'transform lives and communities'.

World Challenge Expedition to India. At the beginning of the summer holidays, after almost two years of fundraising, preparation and planning, forty boys from the fifth and sixth form set off for a month-long expedition in India. The group was divided into three teams, each accompanied by a World Challenge leader, as well as Mr Brenchley, Mr Cotton, Mr Barker and Miss Henderson. Each team followed a similar programme, completing a challenging two-week trek in the Indian Himalayas, a period of volunteer work in local primary schools, and finally a few days of sight-seeing in and around New Delhi.

Inevitably there were challenges to face, but all three teams coped admirably with their itinerary and, all in all, the expedition was a great success. Highlights included the spectacular scenery of the Indian Himalaya, the opportunity

to see Indian village life on the project site and, of course, the chance to visit the magnificent Taj Mahal in Agra.

The boys will be talking in more detail about their trip in assembly this term, and details about the 2010 expedition will be issued later this year.

Geography field trip to the Gredos Mountains. This year 38 sixth formers went to the River Tormes to collect the data they need to write up their A2 coursework. This took about two and a half days of working in the field, with some time back at the study centre logging the data and assessing hazards in a mountainous environment. In addition, the whole party undertook a long hike to familiarise themselves with this sub-alpine environment and the glacial legacy found in this part of the Gredos Mountains.

The Sponsored Walk takes place on Thursday 18 September. We are aiming to raise over £20,000 this time. Your son will have received a sponsorship form. The money will be split between four charities - Maggie's Cancer Care Centre in Oxford, which provides advice and support for those suffering from cancer or for their friends/relatives; Helen and Douglas House in Oxford which provides respite care for seriously-ill children and their families; Asha in Delhi which runs various health and educational centres in the slums; and Agape, the charity we work with in Moldova. Many thanks in advance for your help with this.

The Film Unit. *Gravel and Stones*, Abingdon Film Unit's documentary filmed in Cambodia in 2006, has been selected for the prestigious Raindance Film Festival in London in October, which runs from 1-12 October in various West End venues. Raindance is the UK's largest independent film festival, so this is a very significant honour. Monday 20 October sees the commercial release of the film in France as part of a new DVD collection of Michael Grigsby's films. We will endeavour to supply details of the release at a later date for any who wish to order a copy. A proportion of the sale price will be donated to the charity Landmine Disability Support, whose beneficiaries are featured in the film.

Meanwhile, the Unit enters its sixth year with over thirty students who are now preparing to pitch their ideas to the professional tutors. Training weekends are taking place this month for both the animation and documentary sections, and the latter are visiting Glasgow during the first activities weekend.

During the summer, the Unit's tutors have been taking part in meetings with the BFI and the London Film School to develop proposals for a pilot scheme that would see the Abingdon Film Unit model adopted in a number of London inner city schools. Finally, the United Nations Association is preparing for the first "Young Filmmakers for Development" Festival at the National Film Theatre in London on 29 November, an event that has been developed with the help of the AFU and is likely to feature *Gravel and Stones* once more.

Drama. This term sees numerous productions, full details of which can be found in the Drama newsletter. However, parents may like to make a note of the contrasting productions on offer for senior pupils at Abingdon and St Helen's towards the end of term. St Helen's will present Arthur Miller's modern classic, *The Crucible*, whilst Abingdon will stage Labiche's 19th century farce, *An Italian Straw Hat*. There will also be an original comedy sketch show in October, four new devised pieces by members of the upper sixth Theatre Studies groups and performances of scenes from plays by the GCSE drama students. It will be a busy term with plenty on offer for pupils and parents.

The FxP2 team won some rave reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe with *FxP2 in Trouble*. Here is one reviewer: 'Just one question. Do they put something in the water at Abingdon School to produce talent like this? Quite simply, I loved it.'

Music

Music Examination Success. Congratulations to the fifteen boys who gained distinctions in their music examinations last term. This brings the total last year to 40 out of a total of 178 passes over the year, including 30 at grade 8 level.

Visiting Orchestra from Tokai Boys' School, Nagoya, Japan. We are looking forward to hosting a symphony orchestra from a top Japanese boys' school with a joint concert at Oxford's Sheldonian Theatre on Monday 23 March 2009. We are looking for parents to offer spare beds to these boys for two nights – Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 March. Please contact the Director of Music if you think you can help. We are hoping that there may be a possibility for us to make a return visit to Nagoya in 2010.

A new choir for Abingdon. We are delighted to announce that a new (secular) choir is starting this term under Miss Matthews' direction. School Choir will be open to boys in all years and will provide an exciting alternative to the Chapel Choir.

National Youth Orchestra and Wind Band success. Congratulations to several boys who represented the school nationally in music over the summer. Both David Mears (clarinet) and Nicholas Ereaut (double bass) played in the National Youth Orchestra's BBC Promenade Concert in August. George Bone (French horn) played in the National Youth Wind Orchestra and Christopher Mears (French horn) travelled to Ischia with the National Children's Orchestra as well playing in Rome in front of the British Ambassador.

A professional performing diploma for Guy Cutting. Guy Cutting (tenor voice) is to be congratulated upon gaining his ATCL (Associate of Trinity College, London) professional performance diploma with 94% - a remarkable achievement.

Sport

Athletics. Michael Summers represented Oxfordshire Schools and reached the semi-final in the National Championships at 100m. Peter Barnshaw competed for the winning Oxfordshire Schools' team in the ESAA Combined Events Midland Regional Final in Milton Keynes on 28 June. As the Oxfordshire team finished first, they now go through to the National Finals in Birmingham on Saturday 20 September. Peter came second with a score of 2,495 behind his Oxfordshire team mate with 2,565.

Cricket. The very day of the first eleven's success in winning the national 20-20 final, which I described in my last newsletter, the squad travelled north to Lytham St. Annes to participate in the customary end of term festival. On the Monday, our batting failed against University College School, leaving us 62 for 9, but Jamie Graves and Timothy Deeks (who scored 52) put on 70 for the last wicket to leave us with 132. They carried on with the ball, taking three wickets each, and giving us victory by 10 runs. The next match was against a very strong Birkenhead side who had won all the previous thirteen matches of their season. However, with an outstanding bowling and fielding performance, we dismissed them for 152. We passed their score for the loss of six wickets, with Joshua Smith appropriately seeing us home with an unbeaten 35 to cap another first-class wicket-keeping display. The final game against Lytham was not such a taxing challenge. After dismissing them for 121, with the captain Nathaniel Watkins leading the way with 4 wickets, we got the runs for the loss of 5 wickets: Timothy Deeks who had deservedly been promoted in the batting order scored a second fifty. The three victories completed a run of seven wins out of seven in the last nine days of term. As a whole the season's record was a fine one: in 20 games there were only 4 defeats and 16 wins, including one against the MCC and two others against previously undefeated school sides.

Fencing. William Fotherby has been fencing for England in the UK School Games in Bath. This event included nine disciplines (swimming, gymnastics, volleyball, athletics, table tennis, badminton, hockey, judo and fencing) and around 1,500 athletes aged 16 and 17 from the four home nations. William won a gold medal in the England team sabre event. He achieved this fencing right-handed which, as a left-hander, he has never done before: he had been hit point-on by a sabre on the opening day, puncturing his glove and badly injuring his fencing hand. He was given leave to retire but continued in the competition. In recognition of this, William was honoured by being asked to receive the Trophy for England as the winning nation for the overall fencing discipline (foil, épée and sabre).

Rowing. Thirteen Abingdon School oarsmen represented Great Britain in the various international regattas held during the course of the summer. This was the largest representation of any British school in the 2008 GB team.

Congratulations to:

Matthew Rossiter (5th M8 + U23 World Championships, Brandenburg, Germany)

Max Gander (2nd JM4+ Junior World Championships, Linz, Austria)

Gus Raftery (5th JM8+ Junior World Championships, Linz, Austria)

Oliver Cook (5th JM4- Coupe de la Jeunesse, Cork, Ireland)

Rory Copus (1st JM4+ Coupe de la Jeunesse, Cork, Ireland)

Felix Wood (1st JM8+ Coupe de la Jeunesse, Cork, Ireland)

Andy Hatzis (1st JM2- (sp) Coupe de la Jeunesse, Cork, Ireland)

Simon Jeffreys (1st JM8+ Munich Regatta Germany)

Tim Richards, Daniel Boddington, Rob Fife, Charles Brampton and Hugo Mendus (1st JM8+ J16 GB France Match, Valenciennes, France)

The results achieved by all the oarsmen were spectacular, especially that of Max Gander as obtaining a medal at a World Championship level is an exceptional feat. The attention now turns to the 2009 regatta season and the Head of the Schuylkill Regatta in Philadelphia over the October half term.

Rugby. In late August the U15A and B rugby squad visited the King's School, Bruton, for four days of pre-season training. Between 5 and 21 July a 1st VI squad went on tour in Canada. They played three of the four scheduled matches: the final match against Stoney Creek had to be abandoned due to an electrical storm. In the first match, against Ontario Provincial Team, Toronto, our team won 27-0. The boys acquitted themselves extremely well against some much bigger opposition, but a superior skills set ensured victory in a very hard fought encounter. The next match, against Markham Rugby Club, Toronto, saw a 32-0 win. This was a difficult encounter in which the boys did well to try and play flowing rugby. In the match against Barrhaven Scottish, Ottawa, the boys demonstrated their ability to play as a team, and they won 63-0.

After successes on the opening weekend of the season v. Shiplake, teams had exposure to stiff competition with a block fixture against Eton. The 2nd XV, U15As and U15Cs recorded victories; all other teams struggled to find early season composure!

Sailing. In July the sailing club organised a yachting trip in the Dodecanese Islands in the far east of Greece. During August our yacht racing team, (Nicholas Wilkinson, Rory Spriggs, Thomas Altmann and Jonty Cook, with the addition of Sam Goodchild from Burford) won the RYA National Youth Championships, a very important trophy, and now have an invitation to compete at the national championships in September at which some of the best adult British and international sailors will racing. They have also been invited to represent the country competing for the Governors Cup in California next July. Nicholas Wilkinson and Rory Spriggs have both been invited to the trials for the National Keelboat squad.

Development Office. The School's first Annual Fund proved hugely successful and the generosity of the School's wider community is very much appreciated. The campaign total was £166,000, with some £74,000 received in cash and the remainder in pledges. The main emphasis of the appeal was the new Sports Centre, and just over £58,000 of the funds received have been spent on equipping the new facilities to the highest possible specification. Some donors asked for their gifts to be used for specific purposes, and we are in the process of ensuring that this happens. Departmental heads have been informed of the available donations and we will publish details of how this money has been spent, together with full details of the sporting equipment purchased, later this term. All the funds raised are held in a nominated bank account and are accounted for separately to ensure probity.

The Annual Fund for 2008 – 2009 will be launched later this term but, in the interim, donations will continue to be most welcome.

TASS Diary dates

Volunteers are needed for Open Day, 4 October. TASS is looking for volunteers who can spare a couple of hours to help serve lunch and refreshments to current and prospective parents. If you would like to help, contact tass@abingdon.org.uk

Sixties Quiz Evening, 29 November, with supper for parents and boys. To mark TASS's 40th Anniversary the evening will have a Sixties theme. There will be teams of 4-6 people but if you don't already have a team, we can put you in one. For more information please contact carol.thorn@ntlworld.com

Burns Night, 31 January 2009 – the ever popular Burns supper will be held in Abingdon's Guild Hall. Put the date in your diary and watch out for more information on the TASS page of the school website, www.abingdon.org.uk/go/tass

TASS Christmas card competition. There is just time for boys to enter the Christmas card competition before the closing date of 19 September. A panel of judges, including the Headmaster, Mr Nairne and two members of the TASS Committee, will decide the winning entry, which will attract a £25 prize.

Parking. Further to the warning in my last newsletter, parking restrictions around Park Road and Park Crescent are now being enforced. The club of those who have been clamped is growing. Whilst I sympathise, the positive news is that the roads surrounding the School are now far less congested and much safer than they were.

Please do not pick up or drop off on Park Road, particularly at the School entrance. There is a one-way (clockwise) system being encouraged around Park Crescent.

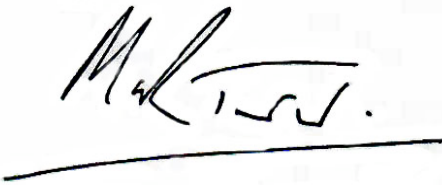
Parents' Handbook. A handbook for parents is now available on the School's Website. The Parents' Handbook is designed to give you an outline of the School's administrative arrangements and policies. It should be seen as a supplement to the standard Terms and Conditions, which parents signed when they accepted a place for their sons in the School. It is designed to help by answering most of the questions you might want to ask. If at any time, however, there is anything you do not understand, or anything you are worried about, please do not hesitate to email or write to us.

Buses. All parents and pupils are reminded that only boys who have signed up to the bus service are authorised to travel on Abingdon School coaches. If your son needs to use the bus as an exception to his normal mode of travel, please contact the Accounts Manager, Clare Butcher, on 0235 849028 or accounts.manager@abingdon.org.uk

School calendar. Two copies of the Calendar for this term were given to boys earlier in the term, one for them and one for their family. Another copy will be sent with the Lists Book and Abingdon News to boys' secondary contacts. Details of the term's events are always available from the website.

Conclusion. I have thoroughly enjoyed welcoming our 174 new boys and a large contingent of new staff. I look forward to opportunities to meet our new parents as the year unfolds.

Yours sincerely,



Enclosed:

Future dates 2009-10
 FASBC Quiz Night
 Music newsletter
 Music dates
 Drama and Film newsletter
 Letter from Mrs Mason
 Open Day 2008

Despatched under separate cover:

Abingdon News
 Lists booklet
 What's On
 Calendar
 Invitations to Open Day
 French Exchange

